



## Six years later, what has become of them?

A cohort study of Somali women and girls who participated in the Somali Girls Education Promotion programme

Rapid Research and Learning Fund, December 2022



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PORTSMOUTH



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This document comprises key findings from *Six years later, what has become of them? A cohort study of Somali women and girls who participated in the Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP)*. The study was undertaken by the University of Portsmouth (UoP), together with local partner, Consilient, between January and September 2022. The study was a longitudinal cohort study of girls' education and life outcomes in Somaliland and Puntland, focusing on former participants of SOMGEP – funded through the Girls Education Challenge (GEC). The study was commissioned by Tetra Tech through the Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF) in late 2021. This report presents headline findings – further detail can be accessed in the explanatory annexes.<sup>1</sup>

## GEC Phase 1 & SOMGEP Background

In its first phase, GEC (2012 – 2017) funded 37 projects across 14 countries, two of which covered Somalia and Somaliland: the rurally focused SOMGEP implemented by CARE International, and the more urban focused Educate Girls, End Poverty (EGEP) programme implemented by Relief International. This research focuses on the former, SOMGEP, or *Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha*. SOMGEP (2013- 2016) covered Somaliland, Puntland, and Galmudug. SOMGEP's theory of change (ToC) held that: to increase rural girls' access to and completion of primary education, and to facilitate their transition to secondary education, it was necessary to shift norms and attitudes to increase recognition of the value and importance of girls' education, and to address the visible and invisible barriers at the household, school, community, and policy levels that are keeping girls from fulfilling their education potential. These were addressed through a range of activities, including community support, teacher training, infrastructure improvements and policy improvements (CARE, 2017).

## SOMGEP Key Outputs

SOMGEP reached 10,145 direct beneficiaries (girls) and another 8,709 boys. As the programme was implemented at the community level, exposure to programme activities went beyond the classroom. For example, 5,345 mothers participated in literacy courses; 209 religious leaders were sensitised on girls' education and gender in Islam; 1,211 Community Education Committee members were trained on school improvement planning; 315 female mentors were trained to encourage girls to take on leadership behaviours and engage in

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<sup>1</sup> **Annex 1** provides an overview of the evidence and research, programme and political economy context; **Annex 2** provides an overview of our research conceptual framework; **Annex 3** provides a deeper overview of our participant recontacting and sampling approach; **Annex 4** contains our piloting approach, tool adjustments and final tools; **Annex 5** highlights how we developed and measured specific proxies used in our analysis; **Annex 6** is an overview of our quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches, and synthesis; **Annex 7** provides an overview of our ethical approach; **Annex 8** provides detail on our study reflections; **Annex 9** details our communication approach; and **Annex 10** consists of topline and regression tables.

leadership roles in their schools; 270 teachers were trained (including 90 women); 150 rural primary schools, secondary schools, and secondary boarding school facilities were refurbished; and policy reviews on the topics of gender equity among students, teacher recruitment and training, data management systems, and school management were conducted.

## Research & Methods Overview

We aimed to generate evidence on the links between early-life characteristics and later-life outcomes of a sample of Somali women who were formerly participants of SOMGEP and participated in its mid-line or end-line evaluations (CARE, 2016; CARE, 2017). As such, using a conceptual framework we designed for the research, we tracked the cohort longitudinally; mapped later-life outcomes as of 2022; and collected data on their perceptions of the SOMGEP programme. The study's design was guided by two initial research questions (RQs). To these, a third RQ was added after data collection, making use of a comparison group of women who were not exposed to SOMGEP interventions.<sup>2</sup> The original RQs (1-2) and added RQ (3) guiding this research are:

1. To what extent do household- and individual-level childhood characteristics predict eventual life outcomes for adolescent Somali girls who have participated in SOMGEP?
2. What self-perceived impacts has programme participation had on former SOMGEP participants?
3. What is the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes, comparing SOMGEP beneficiaries to an unaffected comparison group?

To answer these questions, we employed a sequential multi-mixed method approach focused on primary level data with three core phases: (i) an early qualitative phase (n=19) prior to main data collection to inform tools and the research conceptual framework development; then (ii) a combined quantitative (n=408) and qualitative (n=40) phase; and (iii) a final qualitative phase (n=40) returning to the 40 interviewed in the second phase to validate (or not) key findings. Data was collected in line with our agreed ethical processes between May and August 2022.

**Primary data** was gathered on the current household profile (including marriage and child data); patterns of movement; agency and empowerment; perceptions of literacy; perceptions of SOMGEP; and intergenerational differences.

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<sup>2</sup> The third RQ was added following our Methodological Design Report (April 2022) because the authors became aware of publicly available survey data that would allow them to construct a reasonable comparison group to study the differences between SOMGEP and non-SOMGEP women. Therefore, all aspects of RQ3 were conceived and executed after the completion of data collection.

**Secondary data** focused on project data and documents, including existing SOMGEP mid-line and end-line data, as well as the wider literature on education, gender, agency and empowerment, and the wider political and social Somali background context.<sup>3</sup>

**Limitations** included: lack of a counterfactual group; data limitations from earlier evaluations; small sample size; and challenges in causal attribution. More broadly, much of our analysis required strong assumptions to draw causal inferences (a standard problem in observational studies). Because our analytical approach varies across research questions, we discuss limitations more concretely at the outset of each section of results and in **Annex 10**.

## Key Findings

Below we present findings across three key areas: **SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes (RQ3)**, **Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes (RQ1)** and **SOMGEP Self-Perceived Impacts (RQ2)**.

### 1. SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes

We compared life outcomes of SOMGEP women<sup>4</sup> today to a “comparison group” assembled from the Health and Demographic Survey (HDS), a large-scale, nationally representative survey. We analyse the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes which – in some cases, under restrictive assumptions – can be interpreted as a measure of the programme’s impact.<sup>5</sup> Our analysis reveals strong and systematic relationships between SOMGEP and several women’s life outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Only six years after

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<sup>3</sup> While significant literature exists on the impact of education on women globally, it should be noted that there is very little peer-reviewed academic literature that offers a current overview on education, life outcomes and the empowerment of girls in Somaliland (**Annex 1**).

<sup>4</sup> For conciseness the phrase ‘SOMGEP women’ is used throughout the report to denote surveyed girls and women who were formal participants of the SOMGEP programme. We also use the phrase ‘comparison group’ to denote those who had data gathered from them in the HDS and were considered comparable to SOMGEP women for analytical purposes for the specific question or theme being considered.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that this study did not set out to be an assessment of the SOMGEP programme’s impact six years on. Our sole focus during the study’s design was on RQ1 and RQ2. The opportunity to evaluate the relationship between SOMGEP participation and later-life outcomes was serendipitous – a result of publicly available, large-scale data collected through another research project. Because RQ3 was added only after data collection finished, we did not collect data on all outcomes – such as literacy or other learning outcomes – that would be central to a full programme evaluation. This limits the comparisons we can make between SOMGEP women and the comparison group to those that were coincidental to both our survey and that of the HDS conducted in 2018-2019.

<sup>6</sup> Although several caveats apply to our analytical approach – including the difficulty of defining a suitable comparison group and the fact that the surveys took place around three years apart – we sought to mitigate these concerns by taking an overly conservative approach to the construction of the comparison group and testing the robustness of our findings across various samples and models. The only source of bias that could explain the strong positive results reported here would be if SOMGEP women were drawn from households or communities that systematically outperformed others in educational attainment, employment, and attitudes

programme completion, SOMGEP women are more educated and employed, and less tolerant of marital violence. They also report greater levels of empowerment – in the form of increased power over at least some household decisions – than their non-SOMGEP counterparts. These results are robust across varied analyses and samples of comparison girls; in other areas, though, SOMGEP is not associated with systematic differences in outcomes today. Key findings include:

#### Box 1: SOMGEP Participation and Later Life Outcomes

1. SOMGEP women are significantly more likely to have completed primary and secondary education than comparison women.
2. The prevalence of very early marriage (under 15 years) is lower among SOMGEP women and SOMGEP women marry at older ages (18.3 years vs 16.9 years) on average.
3. SOMGEP women are more likely to be employed or self-employed.
4. SOMGEP women are significantly less likely to tolerate violence and more likely to take an increased role in some aspects of household decision-making.
5. SOMGEP women are less likely to believe FGM is demanded by Islamic doctrine.
6. SOMGEP women consume media more frequently, are more likely to own a mobile phone, and are better connected to mobile money platforms than their non-SOMGEP peers.

## 2. Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes

To answer RQ1, we studied the relationship between early-life characteristics and eventual life outcomes of SOMGEP women. Our data points to some expected and unexpected findings regarding predictors of educational outcomes: early wealth, more consistent experience of schooling in early adolescence, and parents' educational attainment are all linked to better levels of education today for SOMGEP women. These same subgroups of women – from poorer households, with parents less supportive of education, and who experienced early disruptions to their learning – are also more likely to be married, leading to a close correlation between marriage and educational outcomes among SOMGEP women in early adulthood. Early household wealth, too, is the strongest predictor of single women's influence over decision making, yet this link fades when they are married. Key findings include (**Box 2**):

#### Box 2: Early Childhood Characteristics and Current Life Outcomes

1. Early educational limitations, such as grade repetition and being older than average for your school year, are shown to result in fewer completed years of education today.
2. Overall, household wealth during childhood or adolescence is associated with greater long-run educational attainment.

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toward intimate partner violence (IPV). Given the particularly remote locations and the marginalised regions in which SOMGEP was implemented, this explanation is implausible.

3. Many individual-level factors – such as a girl’s enthusiasm or parental support for education – are uncorrelated with greater educational attainment later in life.
4. Parents’ educational attainment predicts increased levels of completed schooling, but this relationship is clearest in the case of a father’s education.
5. Household wealth and parental support for education reduce marriage rates, while disruption of schooling during adolescence increases marriage rates.
6. SOMGEP women who have married do so at a younger age than their mothers and other older female relatives, despite stating that marrying at an older age is preferable.
7. Self-perceived control over decisions in childhood does not follow through to greater reported influence over decisions as adults.
8. The strongest predictor of single women’s influence over decision-making today is childhood household wealth, yet once married this influence dissipates.
9. Childhood household wealth reduces a woman’s tolerance of IPV, which we view as a necessary step toward wider behaviour and social norms changes.
10. Self-reported empowerment at a young age decreases tolerance for IPV later in life.
11. Support for investing in children’s education is only weakly linked to a woman’s views of education when she was younger and is not linked at all to her own educational attainment.
12. Early household wealth does not translate into household wealth today.

### 3. SOMGEP Self-Perceived Impacts

Finally, we analysed the programme’s overarching impact, based on the perceived impacts reported by SOMGEP participants, who remembered the programme from our wider sample. Analysis included comparing perceptions of programme impacts with other factors such as agency and empowerment factors (including control over employment, marriage, and household finances) and current employment status. Key findings are presented in **Box 3**.

#### Box 3: Self-perceived Impacts of Programme Participation

1. Those that remembered SOMGEP reported its positive impacts.
2. While the majority who remembered SOMGEP reported that it gave them useful skills, those who were/ are employed were somewhat less likely to view these skills as useful or to believe the programme had a strong positive impact.
3. Divorced and widowed women reported greater value of SOMGEP in terms of increased confidence, value of skills generated, etc.
4. Women from marginalised households self-reported the strongest overall impacts of SOMGEP.
5. SOMGEP women are more likely to self-report control over household decision-making and less over decisions related to bodily autonomy.
6. SOMGEP women today with higher levels of education, wealth and those that moved to cities are more associated with increased self-reported empowerment.
7. Increased self-reported empowerment is moderately correlated with more progressive views regarding IPV and – to a lesser extent – Female Genital Mutilation / Cutting (FGM/ C).

## Conclusions

The findings of this research demonstrate a clear link between participation in SOMGEP and positive outcomes for women today. We have seen how participation is associated with increased educational attainment for these women, a greater likelihood of employment and decreasing tolerance of IPV, in addition to a range of other positive findings elaborated above. However, the evidence also points to differential impacts across outcomes and that progressive attitudes, actions, or beliefs in certain spheres of SOMGEP women's lives do not necessarily flow through to others. Contextual factors, outside of the scope of GEC or SOMGEP, have played a key role moderating these outcomes today.

The study shows significant promise for the short (and perhaps longer) term impacts of programmes like SOMGEP, and the value of UK His Majesty's Government (HMG's) investment in girls' education. Time will tell if these early investments turn into the longer-term outcomes hoped for and projected by the wider education literature. Further, and later, research will be needed to understand if this is the case.

## Potential Further Research

Possible areas of further research prompted by this study include:

- 1. On-going longitudinal mixed methods research, across contexts** - this research has demonstrated the value of taking a longitudinal lens to measuring and capturing the impact of education on life outcomes for women, even in the most complex of contexts. The continuation of this research longitudinally with SOMGEP participants would enable a rich and more complex picture of how education continues (or not) to benefit and influence in shaping participants' lives. Undertaken across contexts, this would be of significant value.
- 2. Intergenerational change and influence on educational attainment and wider outcomes** – we have seen changing attitudes and behaviours across generations, and the relative self-reported importance of participation in education programmes on women today. More research is perhaps needed to understand the wider intergenerational enabling environment for girls in education, how this can be catalysed to support them, and what 'impact' looks like at the point in their lives when research is undertaken.
- 3. The impact of parallel education systems** – the data has shown that the parallel Madrassa system has interplayed with the secular education system. Researching this interplay and its impact in other contexts would be valuable. For example, how and in what ways do these different systems potentially contrast and contradict each other? A better understanding of how they can be mutually supportive of girls' education would be beneficial.
- 4. Systematic reviews** – contrasting perceptions data, described above, perhaps points to a need to reflect on what we are measuring, how we are measuring it, and if these proxies are appropriate and accurate. A systematic review of wider education



supporting activities, such as work with parents/ care givers, would also be of value, to understand the relative importance of these additional activities across contexts.

## Further Reflections

These conclusions, though, may challenge and prompt some reflections for those designing or implementing education programmes in complex environments, and those researching, evaluating, or using evidence to adjust them. Using the evidence gathered as part of this research as a starting point, together with some of our own team's experience, we provide some reflections below. It should be noted that rather than provide answers, we sometimes pose a question that stimulates further reflection.

1. The pathways from skills learnt for girls through education and their application for future employment or business opportunities need to be further tailored and targeted, and/or made more explicit to the girls being educated.
2. Attitudes and beliefs regarding education, such as parental support for education and girls' belief in the value of education, may play a less important role in overall educational attainment than many programme staff and researchers assume.
3. Other null results challenge conventional wisdom regarding the correlates of educational attainment and highlights the need for further research.
4. Future girls' education programmes could build on the SOMGEP model of extra-curricular classes using older community women as role models and support further community dialogues with men.
5. If shocks occur (such as drought), differentiated household-level support is needed to ensure school attendance is smooth, and maintain the longer-term legacies of continued education for young women.
6. Careful reflection is needed on whether, and how, to engage with religious schools when designing and delivering secular education programmes.
7. Given the impact of technology on women's lives today, exploring the capacity for using technology as a communication and education tool in programmes may be pragmatic.
8. Systematic analysis of potential combinations of contextual moderators over a woman's life course could strengthen both programme and research design.
9. Evidence and 'impact' only make sense in context, so this requires early and on-going mapping for successful programme implementation.
10. Considering some of the challenges the evidence has generated to conventional wisdom regarding educational attainment, are we tackling and tracking the right things for the right purposes?

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## Acronyms

<b>CARE</b>	Cooperative of Assistance and Relief Everywhere
<b>EGEP</b>	Educate Girls, End Poverty
<b>ERP</b>	Ethical Review Process
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FM</b>	Fund Manager
<b>FGM / C</b>	Female Genital Mutilation / Cutting
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based Violence
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>GEC</b>	Girls' Education Challenge
<b>GEC-T</b>	Girls' Education Challenge Transition window
<b>HDS</b>	Health and Demographic Survey
<b>HMG</b>	His Majesty's Government
<b>ICAI</b>	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate Partner Violence
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PEA</b>	Political Economy Analysis
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>RI</b>	Relief International
<b>RQ</b>	Research Question
<b>RRLF</b>	Rapid Research and Learning Fund
<b>SOMGEP</b>	Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UoP</b>	University of Portsmouth

# *Six years later, what has become of them?*

## **A cohort study of Somali women and girls who participated in the Somali Girls Education Promotion programme**

### **1. Background**

*This section sets out the background, purpose and objectives of the research study. A short overview of the programme context is included, as well as an overview of limitations.*

#### **1.1. Introduction**

This document comprises key findings from *Six years later, what has become of them? A cohort study of Somali girls who participated in the Somali Girls Education Promotion programme* (SOMGEP). The study was undertaken by the University of Portsmouth (UoP), together with local partner Consilient between January and September 2022. The study was a longitudinal cohort study of girls' education and life outcomes in Somaliland and Puntland, focusing on former participants of SOMGEP – funded through the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). The study was commissioned by Tetra Tech through the Rapid Research and Learning Fund (RRLF) in late 2021. This report presents headline methods, limitations, findings, and conclusions – further detail can be accessed in the explanatory annexes.<sup>7</sup>

#### **1.2. Research Purpose, Scope & Objectives**

The SOMGEP programme aimed to improve the quality and relevance of learning outcomes for rural and marginalised girls and build a strong foundation for transition into secondary education and eventual employment. Through re-engaging with participants of the programme several years after their direct involvement had ended, our research study offered a unique opportunity to interrogate whether, and in what ways, these outcomes were realised.

Specifically, we sought to generate evidence on the links between early-life characteristics and later-life outcomes of a sample of Somali girls who were formerly participants of

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SOMGEP (2013 to 2016) and participated in the mid-line or end-line evaluations of the programme (CARE, 2016; CARE, 2017). To this end, we tracked the cohort longitudinally; mapped later-life outcomes as of 2022; and collected data on their perceptions of the SOMGEP programme. Primary data was collected in line with our multi-mixed method, sequential design between May and August 2022. The study aimed to generate evidence regarding the following RQs:

1. To what extent do household- and individual-level childhood characteristics predict eventual life outcomes for adolescent Somali girls who have participated in SOMGEP?
2. What self-perceived impacts has programme participation had on former SOMGEP participants?
3. What is the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes, comparing SOMGEP beneficiaries to an unaffected comparison group?

### 1.3. Programme Context

#### **GEC Phase 1 & SOMGEP**

In its first phase, GEC (2012 – 2017) funded 37 projects across 14 countries, two of which covered Somalia and Somaliland: the rurally focused SOMGEP implemented by Cooperative of Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, and the more urban focused Educate Girls, End Poverty (EGEP) programme implemented by Relief International (RI). This research focuses on the former, SOMGEP, or *Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha*. SOMGEP covered Somaliland, Puntland, and Galmudug. SOMGEP's Theory of Change (ToC) was as follows: in order to increase rural girls' access to and completion of primary education, and to facilitate their transition to secondary education, it is necessary to shift norms and attitudes to increase recognition of the value and importance of girls' education, and to address the visible and invisible barriers at the household, school, community, and policy levels that are keeping girls from fulfilling their education potential. These were addressed through a range of activities, including community support, teacher training, infrastructure improvements and policy improvements (CARE, 2017).

#### **SOMGEP key outputs**

Throughout the programme period, SOMGEP reached 10,145 direct beneficiaries (girls) and another 8,709 boys. As the programme was implemented at the community level, exposure to programme activities went beyond the classroom. For example, 5,345 mothers participated in literacy courses; 209 religious leaders were sensitised on girls' education and gender in Islam; 1,211 Community Education Committee members were trained on school improvement planning; 315 female mentors were trained to encourage girls to take on leadership behaviours and engage in leadership roles in their schools; 270 teachers were trained, 90 of whom were female; 150 rural primary schools, secondary schools, and secondary boarding school facilities were refurbished; and policy reviews on the topics of

gender equity among students, teacher recruitment and training, data management systems, and school management were conducted.

## 1.4. Revisions from Research Protocol

Our earlier Methodological Approach paper<sup>8</sup> highlighted key areas in which our approach deviated from our original submission to Tetra Tech. Namely, the lack of a comparison group tracked from the original SOMGEP evaluation cohort prevented us from analysing programme impact using a standard difference-in-differences design, and a revised focus on the rural SOMGEP programme alone. In the process of undertaking the study, a few further revisions have been made, summarised below:

- Further cleaning of the SOMGEP 2015/16 data identified duplicate respondents, reducing our total sample universe – the set of women from which we drew a sample – from 1115 to 861, though this did not affect the sample target (400).
- The identification and availability of a robust dataset, the *Health, and Demographic Survey* (HDS) 2020, conducted in Somaliland and Somalia between August 2018 and December 2019<sup>9</sup> meant we were able to compare our data on SOMGEP women to a comparison group of Somali women.<sup>10</sup>
- An additional third round of qualitative interviews was undertaken in late August 2022 with the same 40 women from the qualitative sample, to validate findings from the main data collection qualitative/ quantitative phase.

## 1.5. Limitations

### Lack of comparison group

The absence of a control group from the original SOMGEP evaluation made drawing conclusions about the programme's long-run impact more difficult. Although the availability and timing of the HDS survey made it possible to construct a comparison group, this required making assumptions about the comparability of SOMGEP and non-SOMGEP

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<sup>8</sup> See UoP (2022), RRLF SOMGEP Methodological Approach, May 2022.

<sup>9</sup> The Somali HDS (2020) and the Somaliland HDS (2020) were both supported by UNFPA; they were conducted at the same time, employed the same sampling strategy, and used broadly the same survey instrument. For brevity, because of their similarities, because the joint data was provided to us by the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, we refer to the joint data as the HDS throughout this report. The bulk of the data we use is drawn from Somaliland, but it also includes respondents from Puntland.

<sup>10</sup> This approach is distinct from the original intent to compare SOMGEP and non-SOMGEP women tracked from the original evaluation cohort, as no comparison group was tracked during SOMGEP's evaluation. Using HDS data referenced here, we were able to analyse the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes despite the lack of a comparison group in the original evaluation. This approach also comes with limitations – discussed in the next section – that make drawing causal inferences from the analysis more tenuous than would apply to a traditional tracked cohort.

women.

### **Data limitations from 2015/16**

Although we identified a subsample of respondents from 2015/16 with both individual and household-level data, few respondents simultaneously completed learning assessments and the survey on leadership skills and self-esteem.<sup>11</sup> This limited the scope of our analyses by, for instance, preventing us from studying how learning scores in 2015/16 predict later-life outcomes.

### **Small sample size**

The study's size was limited, to a large degree, by our ability to re-contact respondents from 2015/16. Despite surprisingly good re-contact rates, the small sample size still limits our ability to detect relatively small or more nuanced relationships. This is one reason why many of our findings concern the impacts of household wealth, educational attainment, and pre-programme educational experience, as these factors tend to have large, more easily detected effects.<sup>12</sup>

### **Omitted variables and the difficulty of causal attribution**

Across all our analysis, we faced limitations in our ability to draw causal inferences. Although we can assess the correlation between, for instance, early-life characteristics and current outcomes, our non-experimental research design does not allow us to make causal claims regarding the impact of these characteristics. A similar limitation applies to analysis of SOMGEP participation and its relationship to current life outcomes, which can only be interpreted causally under strong assumptions. Despite this, we view the non-causal description of correlation across time – such as the persistence in attitudes from childhood to adulthood – as important, given the lack of such studies in developing country settings.

### **Mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews**

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<sup>11</sup> From the set of respondents who had individual- and household-level survey data, we were able to link just 129 of them to completed learning assessments and 87 to completed leadership and self-esteem surveys.

<sup>12</sup> The design of the project required consideration of both statistical power (via power analysis) and expected limits on our ability to reach and interview respondents. At the time, we could only estimate our re-contact rate, because our previous panel-based studies in the region had much shorter periods between interview rounds and we were unsure how effective re-contacting after approximately six years would be. While power analysis was used to understand the power that would be available from various sample sizes, the practical issue of re-contact rates was also factored in, with an initial sample target set at  $n = 400$ .



Ideally all interviews would have been conducted face-to-face. However, logistical considerations and our goal of minimising sample attrition both required the use of telephone interviews in many cases – in the latter case, because we were often able to contact respondents via telephone who would have required replacement if interviews were conducted exclusively in-person. In total, 185 surveys were face-to-face, and 223 were completed via computer assisted telephone interviewing.

**Section 2** of the report provides a summary overview of methods, **Section 3** highlights key characteristics of the women we interviewed and their households today, **Section 4** provides a summary of the key findings, and **Section 5** contains conclusions and further reflections.

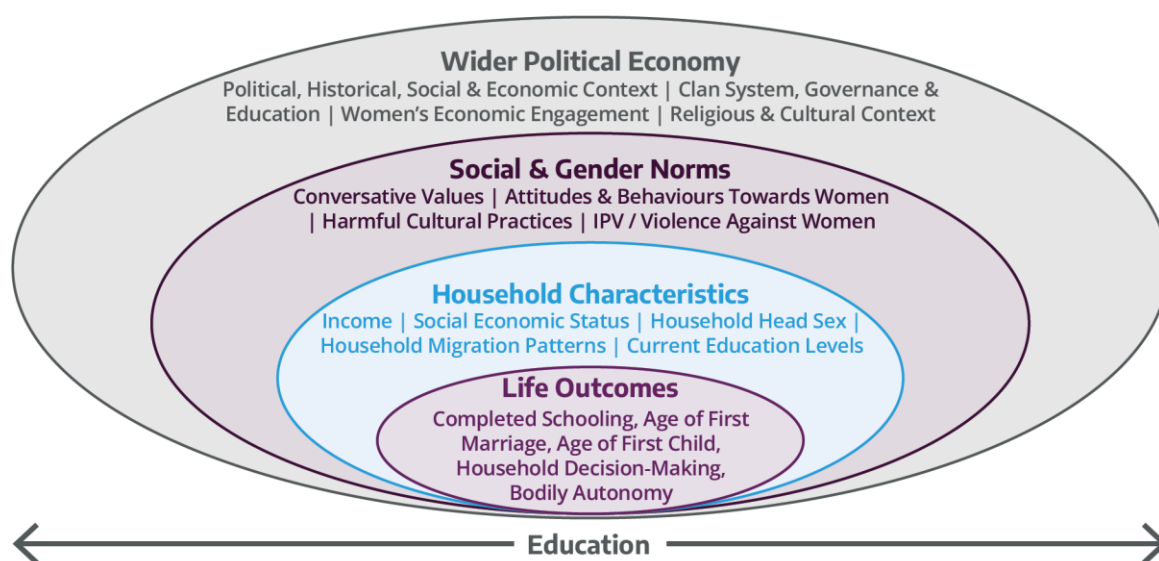
## 2. Summary Approach & Methods

*This section provides an overview of the methods used for this research study, with a short reflection on our overarching conceptual approach first. Further detail can be found in Annexes 3-6 and the methodological approach paper produced earlier in the study.<sup>13</sup>*

### 2.1. Conceptual Framework

The research was underpinned by a conceptual framework that guided our methods, areas of enquiry, and tools. This framework comprised several interrelated dimensions that we aimed to track – each supported by wider theoretical foundations. We developed the framework around the anticipated life outcomes of programme participants, and the contextual moderators that both drive and limit these outcomes. These factors include household characteristics; social and gender norms; and the wider political economy. Education, as a trigger for increased empowerment, shaped our lens. **Diagram 1** provides an overview of the breakdown of these dimensions and what factors we initially planned to track within them.

Diagram 1: Breakdown of dimensions



This conceptual framework evolved over the course of the study in response to patterns in our findings – particularly in relation to expected outcomes and the factors that drive these. **Annex 2** contains the framework and its evolution, and a related diagram is found in **Section 5**.

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<sup>13</sup> This is available upon request and with the permission of Tetra Tech and FCDO.

## 2.2. Methods Approach & Framework

We employed a sequential approach to answer our RQs (see **Table 1**). Each RQ was answered using the same broad research methods to a greater or lesser extent. There was a focus on primary level data, with three core phases: (i) an early qualitative phase (n=19) prior to main data collection to inform tools and the research conceptual framework development; then (ii) a combined quantitative (n=408) and qualitative (n=40) phase; and (iii) a final qualitative phase (n=40) returning to the 40 interviewed in the second phase to validate (or not) key findings. Primary data was supported by secondary data, where available.

**Primary data** was gathered on the current household profile (including marriage and child data); patterns of movement; agency and empowerment; perceptions of literacy; perceptions of SOMGEP; and intergenerational differences.

**Secondary data** focused on project data and documents, including existing SOMGEP mid-line and end-line data, as well as the wider literature on education, gender, agency and empowerment, and the wider political and social Somali background context.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> While significant literature exists on the impact of education on women globally, it should be noted that there is very little peer reviewed academic literature that offers a current overview on education, life outcomes and the empowerment of girls in Somaliland (**Annex 1**).

Table 1: Research & Learning Questions

Research Questions	Data Sources & Data Collection Methods	Synthesis & Analysis
<p>1. <b>To what extent do households- and individual-level childhood characteristics predict eventual life outcomes for adolescent Somali girls who have participated in SOMGEP?</b></p>	<p><b>Broadly the same data sources for each question to a greater/ lesser degree</b></p> <p><b>Primary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative household survey data collected from female former SOMGEP participants.</li> <li>▪ Detailed semi-structured open-ended KIs with GEC participants and wider contextual analysis.</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ SOMGEP mid-line / end-line evaluation data, with additional reanalysis of both data sets.</li> <li>▪ Other SOMGEP / GEC project documentation.</li> <li>▪ Review of wider related academic and grey literature, where available.</li> <li>▪ Political economy analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis of predictors of life outcomes, using quantitative data and multivariate regression models.</li> <li>▪ Coded qualitative data analysis.</li> <li>▪ Synthesis of findings across datasets.</li> <li>▪ Triangulation (where possible) with broader evidence.</li> </ul>
<p>2. <b>What self-perceived impacts has programme participation had on former SOMGEP participants?</b></p>	<p><b>Primary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative survey data collected from female former SOMGEP participants.</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative household survey data collected during the Health and Demographic Survey (HDS) in 2018-2019.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis of relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes (e.g., employment experience, age at marriage, empowerment) using multivariate regression models.</li> </ul>
<p>3. <b>What is the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes, comparing SOMGEP beneficiaries to an unaffected comparison group?</b></p>	<p><b>Primary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative survey data collected from female former SOMGEP participants.</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative household survey data collected during the Health and Demographic Survey (HDS) in 2018-2019.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis of relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes (e.g., employment experience, age at marriage, empowerment) using multivariate regression models.</li> </ul>

## 2.3. Recontacting SOMGEP Women, Sampling, Tool Development, Data Collection

**Recontacting** - Our longitudinal study involved an overarching sample of 861 women who had participated in SOMGEP and were interviewed during the programme's mid-line and/or end-line evaluation. Our first step was to find these women and ask their consent to participate in the data collection. It is usual to allocate only a short period of time for recontacting former programme participants. However, we undertook a multi-step process, taking six-and-a-half weeks from start to finish, using a four-to-seven-person team working full time. This time and resource allowed us multiple attempts at recontacting women. It also enabled us to approach the community and use networks more effectively. This resulted in successful identification of approximately 71% of the women (n=612), from which we could draw the sample.

**Sample** - Prior to sampling, the sample frame was further restricted to 548 women based on age.<sup>15</sup> The sample was stratified by region and drawn from 47 primary schools in Puntland and Somaliland, though concentrated heavily (80.1%) in the latter. The qualitative sample (n=40) was drawn from those who completed quantitative surveys, while attempting to ensure that a range of women were interviewed (i.e., older, younger, across locations, disabled etc.). The set of qualitative interviewees is slightly older, better educated, and has somewhat more liberal gender attitudes than the overall sample but is otherwise very similar to the broader quantitative sample.

**Tool development and data collection** - Tools were developed in parallel, with all team inputs, localisation of questions, piloting and refinement taking place prior to going to the field. Training for the qualitative and quantitative data collection was undertaken in June 2022 in Hargeisa, and various adjustments were made to the tools following piloting. Data collection was staggered, with field teams starting first and phone-based interviews beginning slightly later. Data collection continued until mid-August, ending with a third round of qualitative interviews. With a target of 400 for the quantitative survey, 408 women were finally interviewed. Forty of these women also undertook the qualitative survey and were interviewed two times.

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<sup>15</sup> The sample frame was limited to women above 16 and below 26 years of age. This decision was driven by our goal of studying many present-day life outcomes that are highly correlated with age, such as marriage and whether a woman has given birth. While we control for age in our analysis, placing broad age limits on the sample ensured we would not select a sample that was dominated by younger women, for whom many of the outcomes of interest would not yet be relevant. For instance, a sample that included many 15-16- year-old girls would provide less information regarding age-at-marriage, as fewer respondents in such a sample would be married. Even with this restriction, the variation in age across respondents requires that we simultaneously analyse life outcomes for women who live with their parents and women who have married, which complicates analysis of outcomes such as intra-household decision-making power.

Further details on the recontacting, tool development and piloting process can be found in **Annexes 3 & 4**.

## 2.4. Analysis & Synthesis

Our analytical approach relied significantly on quantitative methods, supplemented with qualitative data collection. Approaches included:

**Quantitative Analysis** - The project's three research questions all lent themselves to the use of multivariate linear regression models. Women interviewed in 2022 were linked directly to their responses – and those of their household – from 2015/16. To study programme impact, we analysed women's perceptions of programme impact in 2022 both in isolation and as a function of a woman's characteristics, such as household wealth and enrolment in 2015/16.

The use of regression models allowed us to control for age, region of origin, and other factors, to isolate – as best as possible – the relationships of interest. We used the same approach to study the relationship between early-life characteristics and outcomes today (such as women's empowerment, views of IPV, and educational attainment), and the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes. Throughout, we made use of indices to measure multidimensional outcomes, such as empowerment in household decision-making, which we discuss in **Annex 5**.

**Qualitative Analysis** - We followed a multi-stepped thematic process to analyse the translated texts from the qualitative narrative life history scripts – using codes and later themes developed initially deductively. Generating codes for the scripts allowed us to analyse and categorise data more efficiently and supported later synthesis with the quantitative data set. While originally, we were going to use NVivo, our team hand coded each script. Two members undertook this separately and then met to rationalise and agree codes in June 2022. These codes were either themes that appeared multiple times across several scripts, or codes that mapped to our RQs. Once the whole qualitative data set was complete, a UoP NVivo expert reviewed it, adding a further layer of quality assurance to the hand coding. See **Annex 6** for a detailed overview.

**Synthesis** - Following data collection, various internal sessions took place with the team to reflect on findings. The core team met in person over one week in late July 2022 to develop headline findings, and test areas of enquiry that may have been generated by one side of the data. This was an iterative approach that continued through to report completion. As findings were generated, where possible these were tested against the available literature and the political economy analysis (PEA). Where relevant, we have brought wider literature into our analysis presented below and in **Annex 1**.

## 2.5. Quality Assurance / Control Processes

**Annex 4** provides a detailed account of the data collection process, including quality assurance and quality control. Because data quality is a function of tool design and training, a concerted effort was made on this front – focusing on question design; local contextualisation of response options; quality translation; deep review of all aspects of the tools during training and piloting; and subsequent reflection and revision of the tools. During fieldwork, quantitative data was reviewed daily for the duration of the survey fielding, to detect unexpected response distributions and markers of poor data quality. Qualitative interview notes were reviewed immediately after submission and spot-checked against audio recordings of the interviews to ensure accuracy and detail. Professor Caine Rolleston independently reviewed quantitative analysis.

## 2.6. Ethics

Our research adhered to FCDO’s Ethical Principles for Research and Evaluation (FCDO 2020)<sup>16</sup> and the GEC II IE’s Ethical Research and Safeguarding Framework approach. It was also guided by UoP’s detailed ethical and safeguarding protocols. All team members adhered to UoP / Consilient ways of working protocols, including ethical, safeguarding, *do no harm*, anti-fraud/ anti-bribery and corruption, and data protection and security policies. The team secured and recorded informed consent, making participants aware of their right to withdraw or not provide a response at any time. Permission was sought from each participant to hold their data, and contact them again in the future, if needed. Further details on our ethical approach during the study can be found in **Annex 7**.

## 2.7. Study Reflections

Undertaking this research study six years after SOMGEP ended has proved enlightening from a process perspective. **Annex 8** contains more detail, with key reflections below:

1. Adequately resourcing the recontacting process was critical to the study’s effectiveness.
2. A sequential design enabled the research team to unpack complex multi-factored influences on study participants.
3. Pre- and post-data collection conversations with the field team contributed significantly to the volume and quality of data collected and findings generated.
4. The identification of a comparative dataset, in the absence of a formal counterfactual, made generation of meaningful findings possible.
5. A clear conceptual framework enabled systematic interrogation of the local context in relation to our RQs.
6. Investing sufficient time in training all team members in our robust ethical protocols ensured they felt confident in applying them.

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<sup>16</sup> See FCDO (2020). FCDO Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring Activities.

### 3. After SOMGEP – Where Are They Now?

*This section provides a brief overview of the individual and household characteristics of the Somali SOMGEP women we interviewed to allow for later contextualisation.*

#### 3.1. Overview

Our 2022 quantitative sample included 408 Somali SOMGEP women spread across nine regions of Somalia, Somaliland, and (in one case) Ethiopia. We provide below some basic individual and household-level data to support contextualisation of our later findings.

#### 3.2. How old are they now? Are they married?

As the **infographic** below sets out, on average our sample was 19 years old, with 90.7% of the sample between 16-22 years old.<sup>17</sup> Just over 19% are currently married, while another 7.1% are either divorced or widowed. Marriage rates rise with age, unsurprisingly, with 19% under 20 years and 54% over 20 years married. Most of the women who are, or have been, married have children: with 91 women (22.3% of the overall sample) who have given birth, having an average of 1.9 children.

#### 3.3. What levels of schooling do they have?

Total educational attainment varies widely. At the low end, 39.8% attended but did not complete primary school, although most reached at least Grade 4. A similar share, 36.3%, completed primary school but did not complete secondary school; a further 24.0% completed at least secondary school. The current enrolment rate is noteworthy, given the age of the typical woman in the sample – 42.4% of women are currently enrolled in school, including a significant number of women over the age of 18.<sup>18</sup>

#### 3.4. Are they employed? Where does household income come from?

In contrast to current enrolment, employment levels are relatively low. Just 6.9% of women are currently employed, although another 11.3% were previously employed. Both current and former employment are relatively evenly split between self-employment – typically running a small shop or market stall – and full- or part-time employment. Most households rely on the income provided by another family member's job (35.5%) or small business (14.7%). However, pastoralism and remittances are also the primary source of income for 11% and 8.8% of households, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> When last re-contacted in 2015/16, the typical woman averaged 13.1 years of age.

<sup>18</sup> Among women over the age of 18, 29.8% (67 in total) were enrolled at the time of data collection.

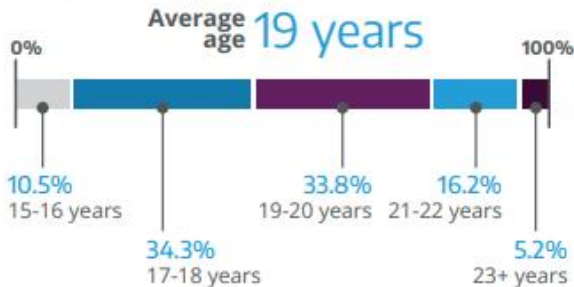
<sup>19</sup> The respondents' own jobs and businesses are also often critical to their household's survival, despite the low employment rate reported above; in practice, where women are simultaneously unemployed and the family's primary source of income, they are likely living without a steady source of income at present.



# Sample Characteristics

**408** SOMGEP Somali Women were interviewed

## Who are they



**26.5%** ever married **17 years**  
Average age of first marriage

**22%** have children **18.4 years**  
Average age of first birth

**12%** are pregnant **~ 2 children**  
on average

## Household Assets/Wealth

**53.9%** own livestock

Household income mainly from other family member or family business

**91.7%** of women personally own a phone

## Employment

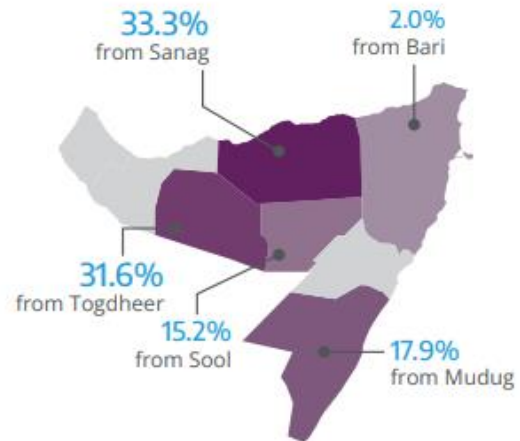
**18%** have ever been employed  
**7%** currently employed

**13** own a small business  
**7** have a full time job  
**7** have a part time job

“When I first started studying, I had the impression that I was going from dark to light.”

Married 20 yr old from Dhoqashay studying Midwifery

## Where are they from



## Migration

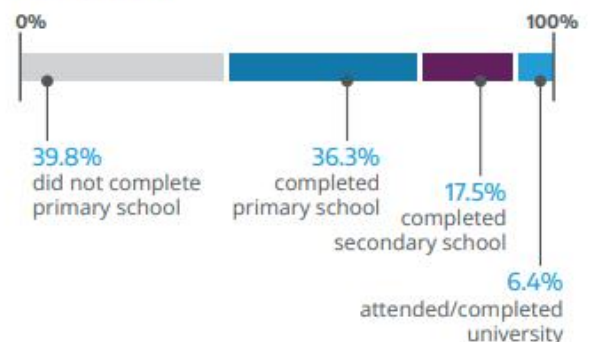
**41.2%** are currently living away from their early SOMGEP home

**55%** are currently living in an urban centre

Top reason for migration is **Education**

Followed by living with their husband or other family member

## Education



### 3.5. Do they own livestock? Have they migrated since SOMGEP?

As SOMGEP was a rural education programme, household economies often remain tied to pastoralism, for example, 53.9% of households own livestock. There is a significant urban-rural divide in the sample owing to migration since the end of SOMGEP, as many women migrated away from their original villages to towns or cities, mainly for educational purposes. Migration rates since 2015/16 are extremely high, with 51.7% of respondents having migrated at least once since that time, and 41.2% living outside their original village. In fact, the sample is now mainly urban: 65.7% of respondents live in either a city or town.<sup>20</sup> The sample is concentrated in the original five SOMGEP programme regions, but a large share (9.6%) now resides in Hargeisa.

### 3.6. Qualitative Sample

A sample of 40 qualitative interviewees was selected from among the set of quantitative respondents. As selection for an interview was non-random, it is important to consider whether the qualitative interviewees differ systematically from the quantitative sample.<sup>21</sup> Overall, qualitative interviewees were slightly older (19.5 versus 19 years) and somewhat more educated than the broader sample. The average qualitative interviewee had completed school through Grade 11, compared to Grade 8 among the broader sample. They were more likely to be widowed or divorced, less likely to be married, and slightly more likely to have at least one child. More importantly, as shown in **Annex 3**, qualitative interviewees tended to have slightly more liberal attitudes, such as lower tolerance for IPV.

In other ways, the two samples were very similar. The rate of current school enrolment and employment is nearly identical across the two groups. Importantly, urban survey respondents were no more likely to be included in the qualitative sample.<sup>22</sup> Geographically, the qualitative sample very slightly over-represents Togdheer and Maroodi Jeex – the location of Somaliland's two largest cities. The most consequential gap between the qualitative and quantitative sample concerns views on FGM/ C and IPV. Therefore, in cases where qualitative interviewees express liberal views on these topics, it is important to consider whether they align with the quantitative sample. Beyond these specific areas, however, there is only limited reason to be concerned regarding the composition of the qualitative sample.

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, moving to the city does not remove economic links to rural areas, and migration is often temporary, especially for women who have migrated to pursue educational opportunities.

<sup>21</sup> Most (85.1%) survey respondents consented to a qualitative interview, and our researchers coordinated with them to complete 40 total interviews.

<sup>22</sup> Field teams made a concerted effort to conduct qualitative interviews during visits to rural villages, which is reflected in the strong representation of rural respondents in the qualitative sample.

## 4. Summary Key Findings

*This section provides a summary of key findings against each high-level research question and programme impact.*

### 4.1. Overview

Below we present findings across three key sub-sections:

- **SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes** – where we compare life outcomes of SOMGEP women today to a “comparison group” assembled from the HDS, a large-scale nationally representative survey.<sup>23</sup>
- **Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes** – where we look at trends between early individual and household characteristics and current life outcomes of SOMGEP women today.
- **SOMGEP Perceptions** – where we discuss what SOMGEP women think the impact of the programme has been on them.

As described in **Section 2.4**, we generally employ regression models to study each of the three research questions. We discuss the precise setup in more detail in each sub-section, as well as **Annex 10**. Readers should note our approach to reporting statistical findings: with few exceptions, we only report results that are statistically significant at the 10 percent level ( $p < 0.10$ ). Where results are suggestive or of interest but fail to meet this threshold, we specify that they are not statistically significant. Likewise, if results are highly sensitive to the model chosen, we alert readers to this fact in the text. In rare cases we describe the robustness of particularly strong and consistent findings, but readers should assume that a finding reported without caveat is statistically significant at conventional levels and not an artefact of specific modelling choices.

Although qualitative evidence is added to the quantitative evidence below, to avoid repetition in responses within the same core areas of analysis, we have added specific stand-alone sections from the qualitative data on the following key areas: agency and empowerment; SOMGEP impact; and a focus on intergenerational factors. In most of the analysis, where comparable, the qualitative data aligned with the related quantitative findings but added nuance or helped to support the findings’ explanations.

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that this study did not set out to be an assessment of the SOMGEP programme six years on. Our sole focus during the study’s design was on RQ1 and RQ2. The opportunity to evaluate the relationship between SOMGEP participation and later-life outcomes was serendipitous – a result of publicly available, large-scale data collected through another research project. The goal of this additional RQ (#3) is to provide evidence regarding SOMGEP’s impact, though we are cautious regarding our ability to draw causal inferences from the design and data available.

Where standalone quotes from the qualitative data collection are given, some basic data about the participant it came from is also provided to help contextualise the evidence contained, while at the same time protecting their anonymity.<sup>24</sup>

## 4.2. SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes

In this section, we test the relationship between SOMGEP participation and current life outcomes several years after the programme's conclusion using a comparison group assembled from a large-scale, nationally representative survey of women (the HDS). We discuss the analytical approach and its limitations in more detail below and in **Annex 10** while noting, at the start, that inferring causality (or programme 'impact') from our results is dependent on assumptions regarding the comparability of SOMGEP women and those sampled through the HDS. Throughout, we make the most rigorous comparisons possible in the absence of a quasi-experimental or experimental research design, but we also encourage caution regarding attribution of the differences between the two groups to the programme's impact.

The results of this comparison are striking. Our analysis, set out below, reveals strong and systematic relationships between SOMGEP participation and several current life outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Only six years after programme completion, SOMGEP women are more educated and employed, and less tolerant of marital violence. They also self-report higher levels of empowerment than their non-SOMGEP counterparts. Key findings are presented in **Diagram 2** below:

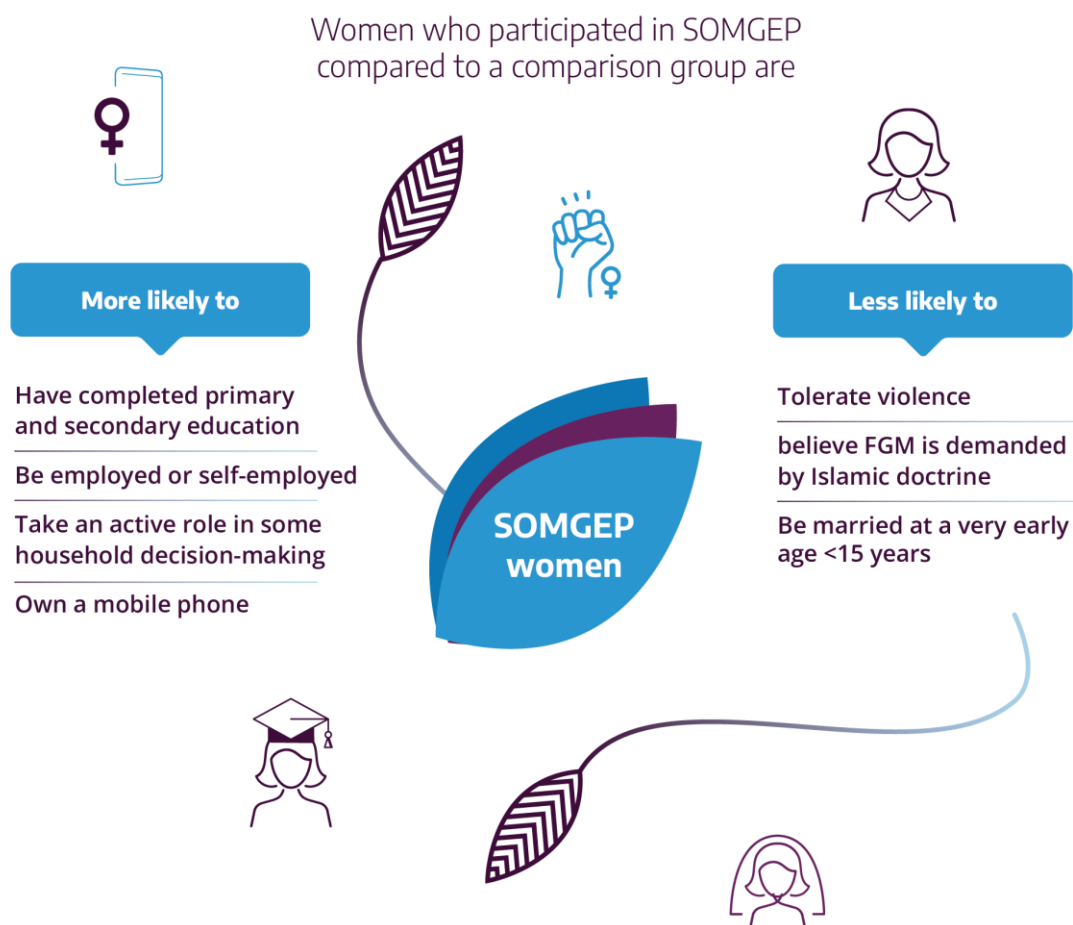
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<sup>24</sup> To avoid repetition and for reader clarity, when references are made to when 'Women spoke of...' this infers the evidence then presented is from the qualitative dataset.

<sup>25</sup> Although several caveats apply to our analytical approach – including the difficulty of defining a suitable comparison group and the fact that the surveys took place around three years apart – we sought to mitigate these concerns by taking an overly conservative approach to the construction of the comparison group and testing the robustness of our findings across various samples and models. The only source of bias that could explain the strong positive results reported here would be if SOMGEP women were drawn from households or communities that systematically outperformed others in educational attainment, employment, and attitudes toward IPV. Given the particularly remote locations and the marginalised regions in which SOMGEP was implemented, this explanation is implausible.

Diagram 2: SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes

## SOMGEP Participation and Current Life Outcomes



Our approach to assessing SOMGEP’s association with better life outcomes uses a straightforward comparison between SOMGEP women and similar women who were not exposed to the programme. Both the HDS and the SOMGEP sample (in 2014-16) were selected using methods that produce representative samples: the former is representative at the regional level, while the latter used a random walk within programme communities and is theoretically representative of women in the programme’s targeted age range within those communities.<sup>26</sup> We identified a narrow comparison group from among the large (n = 16,486) HDS sample by restricting the group to those who met the following requirements:

<sup>26</sup> We refer to the original evaluation samples as *theoretically* representative because the employed methodology would produce a representative sample, but it is not entirely clear how closely the actual process adhered to the methodology. More importantly, although the original SOMGEP evaluation samples were representative of

- Same age range (15-25 years) as the bulk of SOMGEP women we sampled;
- Enrolled in school at some point in the past, regardless of overall attainment<sup>27</sup>; and
- Reside in the same regions as SOMGEP women and reside in rural areas<sup>28</sup>.

Leaving aside any biases introduced during our own re-contact process, these restrictions ensure that the comparison we make is between a representative sample of all women aged 15-25 in the target regions and a rigorously selected, though not necessarily representative, sample of comparable women exposed to SOMGEP programming.<sup>29</sup>

Our primary comparison group includes 1,958 women to a treatment sample of 401.<sup>30</sup> We also test the robustness of our results using alternative definitions of the comparison group. A secondary comparison group includes urban women, which poses a more difficult test for the almost exclusively rural SOMGEP sample.<sup>31</sup> We also construct matched samples using entropy balancing (Hainmueller, 2012) as a further insurance of robustness.

For each outcome, we define SOMGEP's impact as the absolute difference in the outcome between the SOMGEP and comparison groups, after controlling for age, current region of residence, and – where relevant, urbanity.<sup>32</sup> Again, this difference only represents programme

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programme communities, this does not mean our *current* sample of SOMGEP women is representative of either the programme beneficiaries or women from the programme communities. Differential attrition during the re-contact phase could bias the sample in important ways. In **Annex 3** we investigate this possibility: while our re-contact rate was correlated with region and with a woman's enrolment status in 2015/16, there is evidence that bias from differential attrition is small, though even small levels of bias are problematic.

<sup>27</sup> Nearly all SOMGEP women were enrolled in school at some point during their lives, though many were out-of-school at the time of the mid-line and end-line evaluations conducted in 2015/16. Therefore, to ensure comparability, we exclude girls who *never* enrolled in school.

<sup>28</sup> This criterion is complicated by the migration of SOMGEP women since the end of the programme, meaning that a comparison group could be comprised of either women from the same *original* regions or the same *current* regions as SOMGEP women. We discuss our approach to this issue in more detail in **Annex 10**. Our goal, throughout, is to employ the most conservative approach possible, constructing a comparison group that – if anything – is biased against finding positive programme impacts.

<sup>29</sup> See **Annex 3** for a discussion of the re-contact process and assessment of any biases that might have been introduced because of attrition in the SOMGEP sample between 2015/16 and 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Our treatment group sample size of 408 is reduced by exclusion of outliers on age (those over 25 years old) and those living in regions with two or fewer SOMGEP women (Sahil, Somaliland; Mudug, Galmudug; and Ethiopia). Note that we construct several different comparison groups, with sample sizes ranging from 393 up to 1,958 respondents. The option we use most frequently is the largest comparison group, which is also the most conservative, as it includes urban women.

<sup>31</sup> Urban women in the Somali context tend to have better life outcomes. For instance, drawing from the HDS data, they are more likely than rural women to have completed primary (63.6% versus 38.6%) and secondary (24.7% versus 9.9%) school. They are also less tolerant of IPV and marry at slightly older ages, on average.

<sup>32</sup> We are unable to control for additional household characteristics, due to issues accurately linking women's data to that of their households. As a result, the strength of our inferences relies heavily on how we construct the

impact under the specific, restrictive assumption that the comparison group is a valid counterfactual for SOMGEP women. An additional limitation is that we are only able to study outcomes that were captured – using equivalent questions – by both our survey and the HDS. Further details on the comparison groups, balance between treatment and comparison groups, and the regression models employed to assess SOMGEP’s impact are provided in **Annex 10**. Expanded key findings include:

### **SOMGEP women are significantly more likely to have completed primary and secondary education than comparison women**

Primary and secondary completion<sup>33</sup> show the largest differences between SOMGEP and the comparison group. Overall, we find that SOMGEP women are 23.5 percentage points more likely than HDS comparator women to complete primary education, and 10.5 percentage points more likely to complete secondary education, after accounting for their age and region. This pattern holds – with statistically significant differences in primary and secondary completion rates – across all six possible comparison groups and the use of matching methods to ensure greater balance between the SOMGEP and non-SOMGEP groups.<sup>34</sup>

To illustrate the magnitude of the effect, consider the average woman in our comparison group, who is 19 years of age, lives in Sanaag, and had a 52.3% chance of completing primary school. An equivalent SOMGEP participant had a 75.7% chance of completing primary school. We estimate SOMGEP would increase the same woman’s likelihood of completing secondary school from 19.3% to 29.8% – again, considering age, region, and urban versus non-urban residence.

**Graph 1** below breaks down the difference between SOMGEP and comparison of women by their age at the time of the survey. The left panel shows primary completion rates for each group, with completion rates among SOMGEP women represented in purple. The gap between SOMGEP and comparison women starts as early as 15 years old but widens further among those within the 17-20 years age bracket. Secondary education completion is similar between SOMGEP and comparison women up until 17 years old, after which SOMGEP women are more likely to have completed secondary school. These results are robust to

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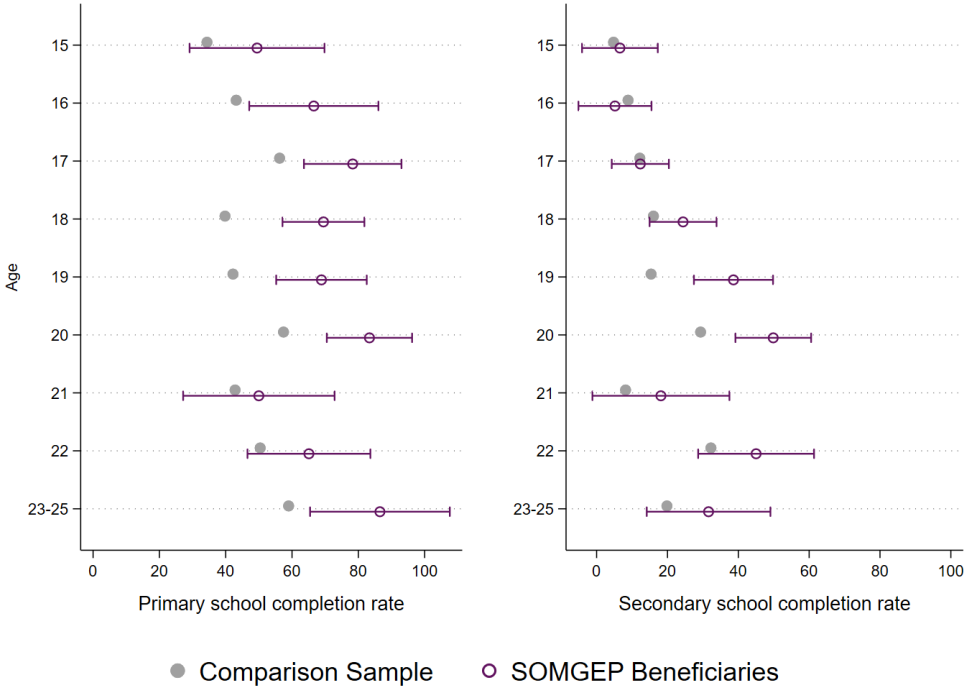
comparison group. For two outcomes – educational attainment and marriage – we can control for an additional set of household characteristics, such as wealth, which allows us to test the robustness of our findings to additional controls. The fact that the results hold with their inclusion gives us greater confidence that our other results – where we are unable to control for additional household characteristics – are not driven by this fact.

<sup>33</sup> This study was not testing the quality of education (i.e., literacy received), which is shown to impact at an even greater degree than schooling completed on life outcomes today (Kaffenburger, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Indeed, our preferred results are conservative. Across 12 analyses (reported in **Annex 10, Tables 1 and 3**), we estimate SOMGEP women are between 23.5 and 42.2 percentage points more likely to complete primary school; all findings are significant at the 1 percent ( $p < 0.01$ ) level. Likewise, secondary completion rates are between 10.5 and 19.7 percentage points higher for SOMGEP women (**Annex 10, Tables 2 and 4**), depending on the comparison group chosen ( $p < 0.01$  for all tests).

several alternative samples, including those in which we restrict the comparison sample to only urban or only rural women.<sup>35</sup>

Graph 1: Impact of SOMGEP participation on primary and secondary school completion rates, by age group<sup>36</sup>



It is important to emphasise that this finding is not driven by more consistent enrolment year-on-year, with comparison girls catching up at a later age. If SOMGEP led only to *earlier* completion of primary or secondary school, we would observe a gap in completion rates among younger girls that closes as girls age. However, this is not the case: in comparison, girls have lower primary completion rates even among the older age groups, and it is unlikely that a substantial number of women would continue primary education into their mid-20s.

**The prevalence of very early marriage (under 15 years) is lower among SOMGEP women and SOMGEP women marry at older ages (18.3 years vs 16.9 years) on average**

<sup>35</sup> Our purpose in this graph is not to make claims about the impact on specific age groups, as the age-specific samples used are quite small. Instead, the goal is to show that a statistically and substantively significant result regarding primary completion in the aggregate is not driven by a particular age group and to allow readers to understand the patterns across age groups more generally.

<sup>36</sup> Each dot in the figure represents the average primary (left panel) or secondary (right panel) school completion rates among a given age group. Grey dots denote the comparison sample; the hollow purple dot indicates the sample of SOMGEP beneficiaries. The horizontal bars represent the 95% confidence interval for the primary/secondary completion rate among SOMGEP beneficiaries.



Although still in young adulthood, the evidence suggests that SOMGEP participation is associated with later marriage and a reduction in early marriage specifically. Women that participated in SOMGEP were 5.8 percentage points less likely to be married very early (before the age of 15). This result is robust to alternative comparison groups (see **Annex 10, Tables 11-12**).<sup>37</sup> Among those who have married, SOMGEP women tended to marry around 1.4 years later, at a typical age of 18.3 years, compared to 16.9 years among the comparison group.<sup>38</sup>

This finding is complicated slightly when we analyse the propensity of women to be married as a function of SOMGEP exposure and her current age and region. When compared to girls of the same age living in rural areas, SOMGEP women are 9.4 percentage points less likely to be married. A gap between the two groups begins to emerge at age 18 and continues into older age groups. At the same time, when we compare SOMGEP participants to the comparison group of only urban women, SOMGEP participation *increases* marriage rates at each age level.<sup>39</sup> While we generally view rural women as the most logical comparison sample for SOMGEP beneficiaries, the fact that the result is sensitive to our choice of comparison groups – urban versus rural women or a combination of the two – gives us less confidence that SOMGEP reduced marriage rates, because our conclusion rests on untestable assumptions regarding the most rigorous comparison group to use.<sup>40</sup> However, even if SOMGEP did not reduce marriage rates themselves, the fact that SOMGEP is associated with *later* marriage – across any comparison group we used – is an unambiguously positive outcome.

Once married, SOMGEP women are slightly more likely than comparison women of an equivalent age to have given birth. However, as with our analysis of marriage rates, this

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<sup>37</sup> The comparison group is especially important in the analysis of marriage outcomes, because urban Somali women tend to marry later than their rural peers. Our preferred results account for this by including urban women in the comparison group, though our results remain strong ( $p < 0.01$ ). In all other comparison groups, SOMGEP is associated with an even stronger reduction in early marriage rates (all tests have  $p < 0.01$ ).

<sup>38</sup> As with the prevalence of early marriage, the gap in age at marriage between SOMGEP and non-SOMGEP women is statistically significant and consistent across all models (**Annex 10, Tables 9-10**).

<sup>39</sup> This is directly related to the lower marriage rates, at each age, among urban versus rural women in the comparison group. SOMGEP women have lower marriage rates than the rural comparison group but higher rates than the urban comparison group.

<sup>40</sup> See **Annex 10, Tables 7-8**. We must make decisions regarding whether to compare SOMGEP women to urban or rural women because, although SOMGEP was a rural programme, many of its participants transcend this divide, having moved to urban areas. It is unclear whether they should be compared to women who remain in rural areas (who we would expect to have worse life outcomes, on average) or those who grew up and live in urban areas (who we would expect to have better life outcomes, on average). Where SOMGEP women outperform *both* comparison groups, we are more confident in our results, because they are not dependent on our analytical choice.

finding is dependent on the comparison group used.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, because marriage and childbirth are so closely correlated – 84.6% of non-single women have given birth – the increased likelihood of giving birth is almost entirely offset by SOMGEP women’s reduced likelihood of marriage. In short, SOMGEP is loosely associated with lower marriage rates but an increased rate of motherhood among those women who were married. Taken together, SOMGEP women are no more likely to have given birth than comparison women, largely because they are less likely to be married. As noted, these relationships are conditional on the precise comparison group employed – the only finding consistent across models is that SOMGEP is associated with a reduction in early marriage and an increase in the average age at which girls marry.<sup>42</sup>

### **SOMGEP women are more likely to be employed or self-employed**

Employment is rare in both the SOMGEP and comparison groups, with just 4.9% of the comparison group currently employed.<sup>43</sup> Even at this low rate, SOMGEP women are significantly more likely to be employed or self-employed than those in the comparison group – controlling for age and region, SOMGEP women are 6.7 percentage points more likely to be employed.<sup>44</sup> This result is almost certainly related to the fact that SOMGEP beneficiaries complete more schooling and are less likely to be married at this point in their lives, potentially increasing the likelihood that they will participate in the workforce in early adulthood. Overall, SOMGEP participation is associated with higher (6.7%) employment rates, although the effect is somewhat larger among those who currently live in rural areas and slightly smaller in urban areas. Importantly, SOMGEP has only a small effect on employment among women under 18 years of age; instead, the largest effects are among adult women, especially those 21 years and older. In short, SOMGEP is not associated with a meaningful increase in underage employment but is correlated with increased employment among adult women.

### **SOMGEP women are significantly less likely to tolerate violence and more likely to take an increased role in some aspects of household decision-making**

The two surveys included identical questions – asking women whether they felt a husband would be justified in beating his wife under three circumstances: 1. If she went out without

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<sup>41</sup> See alternative models in **Annex 10, Tables 13-14**.

<sup>42</sup> The relationships between SOMGEP participation – on one hand – and both early marriage and the age at marriage are consistent and statistically significant across all comparison groups considered. These results are documented fully in **Tables 9-12** of **Annex 10**. Inconsistent results regarding marriage and motherhood rates are documented in **Tables 7-8** and **13-15**, respectively, of **Annex 10**.

<sup>43</sup> Just 28 SOMGEP women and 23 women in the largest comparison sample are currently employed. Several SOMGEP women were employed previously, but this information was not captured in the HDS survey, so our analysis focuses exclusively on current employment.

<sup>44</sup> This result is robust across all possible comparison groups; see **Annex 10, Tables 16-17**.

telling him; 2. If she neglected household duties, including cooking; 3. If she argued with him. We coded each question on a binary scale, with 1 indicating that a woman felt violence would be justified or stating that they did not know; thus, higher scores indicate greater tolerance for IPV.

Across all three questions, SOMGEP women are significantly less likely to tolerate violence. They are significantly less likely than an average (modal) woman (13.5% versus 30.7%) to report that violence is acceptable in a scenario in which the woman has neglected household duties, and 24.9 points less likely to rationalise violence if a woman argues with her husband.<sup>45</sup> These sharp differences control for age, marital status, and region of the women in question and are robust to all possible comparison samples.<sup>46</sup> A straightforward comparison, without using linear regression, illustrates the extent of the gap: 16.7% of SOMGEP women would tolerate wife-beating if a woman went out without telling her husband, compared to 36.9% of the comparison group.

SOMGEP women also hold greater decision-making power within their marriages. This analysis is based on a smaller sample, because it is limited to women who are, or have been, married (n=108 in the SOMGEP sample; n=471 in the comparison sample). The HDS captures data on two decisions that overlap with our data: control over a woman's access to healthcare and control over major household purchases.<sup>47</sup>

We define a woman as exercising influence over the decision if she reports that the decision would be made by her alone or jointly with her husband. By this metric, and using our preferred comparison group, SOMGEP women are 14.5 percentage points more likely to have input into major household purchasing decisions and 7.3 percentage points more likely to have input into healthcare decisions pertaining to the respondent herself.<sup>48</sup> These gains are shared across urban and rural women.

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<sup>45</sup> In the latter scenario, a modal woman in the comparison group has a 29.2% likelihood of reporting that wife-beating is acceptable, while an otherwise-equivalent SOMGEP woman has a 4.3% likelihood of the same.

<sup>46</sup> **Annex 10, Table 20** reports on individual scenarios, while **Tables 18** and **19** focus on an index that aggregates responses to all three scenarios.

<sup>47</sup> The question regarding control over healthcare decisions was framed differently between our survey – which asked specifically about seeing a doctor if the woman had been sick for several days – and the HDS, which asked about healthcare for the woman in generic terms (i.e., “Who usually makes decisions about health care for yourself?”) It is worth noting that a broader analysis of decision-making influence among SOMGEP women revealed a fairly stark difference between decisions related to household finances and those related to female bodily autonomy (e.g., healthcare, birth spacing, leaving the home without permission). Both single and married women tend to exercise much more control over financial decisions, a pattern which would be a fruitful avenue for further research.

<sup>48</sup> The latter effect is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.15$ ). While the effect size is substantively large, we cannot distinguish it from a null result; in addition, the finding is sensitive to the comparison group used, which reduces

Two possible criticisms of this analysis concern our definition of control over decision-making as either joint or sole and, more broadly, the possibility that SOMGEP women's responses are biased due to social desirability. To address the first concern, we used an alternate coding scheme, which assessed whether women had *sole* control over these decisions. Naturally, this is a higher bar of intra-household power, and the share of women who report that they would make decisions regarding healthcare or major household purchases themselves is much lower than when we include joint decision-making. Nonetheless, the effect of SOMGEP generally is still clear, increasing the likelihood that a woman would self-report control over each decision by 14.5 percentage points (major purchases) and 7.3 percentage points (respondent's healthcare), respectively.<sup>49</sup>

The second concern applies to respondents' stated tolerance for IPV, views of FGM/C (discussed in the following section) and – perhaps to a lesser degree – self-reported influence over household decisions. If SOMGEP women take more negative views of IPV because they are more aware that this is socially desirable or because they believe this is what survey enumerators 'want to hear', our findings would be biased. This could occur, especially, if SOMGEP interventions gave women the idea of what a 'proper' response would be, and they react during the interview accordingly. While we cannot eliminate this concern altogether, there are several reasons why we still view the results in this section as credible.

First, while SOMGEP included pro-empowerment interventions, IPV and FGM/C were not a focus of the programme. It is unclear, therefore, why SOMGEP women would feel greater pressure (whether from the programme or from interaction with enumerators) to report positive views than non-SOMGEP women.<sup>50</sup> Second, any priming effect or nudging toward desired outcomes experienced through the programme are in the distant past, which should reduce any social desirability effect.<sup>51</sup> Third, any incentive to make the programme appear

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our confidence in the relationship somewhat. On the other hand, the direction of the relationship is consistent across all comparison groups, and we feel moderately confident that there is – at minimum – a weak relationship between SOMGEP participation and control over healthcare decisions. This uncertainty does not apply to decisions around household purchases, where SOMGEP is associated with increased influence for women across all models, at  $p < 0.05$  (see **Annex 10, Tables 25 and 26** for results for household purchases and healthcare decisions using our main coding scheme).

<sup>49</sup> Full results for the sole control coding scheme are available in **Annex 10, Tables 21–24**.

<sup>50</sup> Social desirability bias would be most plausible in the context of a woman's attitudes toward education, a direct focus of the programme. We view control over household decisions as a moderate case, given the programme's inclusion of empowerment messaging, but linking opposition to IPV to respondents' expectations of how they *should* respond is less plausible.

<sup>51</sup> Priming effects are widely believed to dissipate rapidly over time (e.g.: Higgins, E. Tory, John A. Bargh, and Wendy Lombardi. 1985. "Nature of Priming Effects on Categorization." *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 11 (1): 59-69). This is also consistent with foundational models of social cognition and accessibility (see discussion in: Fiske, Susan T., and Shelley E. Taylor. *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture*. London: Sage). While social desirability effects can be distinct from priming, we would expect temporal distance to reduce their magnitude.

more effective (i.e. to show that the programme is having its desired impact to ensure it continues) no longer exists, as the programme is over. Fourth, and most importantly, our findings are consistent across many outcomes, including several that are unlikely to be driven by social desirability. While respondents may feel compelled to overstate their empowerment within their households, there is little reason to believe social desirability would cause them to mis-report employment, misreport the age at which they were married or overstate their consumption of media. The fact that SOMGEP is associated with a range of non-empowerment outcomes – including many we would expect to be correlated with empowerment, reduced tolerance for IPV, and so forth – increases our confidence that social desirability is not responsible for the findings in this section.<sup>52</sup>

### **SOMGEP women are less likely to believe FGM/C is demanded by Islamic doctrine**

In addition to lower tolerance of violence and greater influence over decisions vis-à-vis their husbands, SOMGEP women are also less likely to state that the practice of FGM/C is linked to and mandated by their religion. We asked women simply whether they believed FGM/C was required by Islam. Nearly half (49.3%) of SOMGEP women said that it is. However, they are 6.1 percentage points more likely to state that FGM/C is *not* required by Islam than the comparison group. Notably, this link is substantively strong, but statistically insignificant in several of our models – consistently positive estimates suggest a relationship, but one which is only marginally significant in most cases.<sup>53</sup>

The relationship between SOMGEP participation and views on FGM/C may stem from the programme's correlation with greater educational attainment, as more educated women tend to view FGM/C as outside the bounds of Islamic belief.<sup>54</sup> Of course, as we note elsewhere in this report, beliefs regarding FGM/C may not translate into lower rates of FGM/C, as social norms reinforce the practice regardless of a woman's beliefs.<sup>55</sup>

In recent years, movements to try and combat the practice have been driven by civil society and donor-funded programmes, and government – in 2018 a fatwa was issued by the

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<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that social desirability bias is non-existent. Bias toward more positive views may be present and cause us to overestimate the *magnitude* of the relationship between SOMGEP participation and attitudes. However, given the discussion here, we feel confident that any bias from social desirability is comparatively small and the large effect sizes reported would be obtained even in its absence.

<sup>53</sup> See **Annex 10, Tables 39–40**.

<sup>54</sup> Among both SOMGEP and comparison women, belief that FGM/C and Islam are linked is lowest among those with post-secondary education and, in general, this belief is negatively correlated with greater educational attainment.

<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot assess the impact of the programme on female preferences regarding FGM/C for their own daughters, because the public HDS dataset excludes this question.

Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>56</sup> All of which might have impacted on the numbers citing it was a religious belief in our study. Despite this, the practice of FGM/C is deeply entrenched and normalised in Somalia and Somaliland: prevalence is nearly universal among Somali women, with many women citing both religious and cultural practices as the reason to maintain it (UNFPA, 2022).

### **SOMGEP women consume media more frequently, are more likely to own a mobile phone, and are better connected to mobile money platforms than their non-SOMGEP peers**

SOMGEP women tend to have better access to media and financial services than comparison women of equivalent ages. The relationship between the programme and internet usage is strong, with SOMGEP women 22.9 percentage points more likely to use the internet at least weekly than the comparison group; similar findings are obtained when we consider daily internet usage as well. SOMGEP is also associated with greater access to telecommunications and financial services. While 75.2% of comparison women own a mobile phone, this rate is 91.8% among SOMGEP women; and the usage of mobile money services (e.g., Zaad) is 16 percentage points higher among SOMGEP women. While it is possible that the more recent data collection among the SOMGEP sample (2022, compared to 2019) would produce higher rates of mobile phone, internet, and mobile money penetration in rural areas, these results are consistent – albeit slightly smaller in magnitude – even when we compare SOMGEP women *only* to comparison women living in urban areas.<sup>57</sup>

Against the backdrop of the qualitative interviews this finding comes to life. SOMGEP women spoke of the deep impact of technology on their lives today. Technology was not only cited as being a means of opening up their lives to the outside world but also as another way of finding their husbands.

*'When you talk through the phone you can see if he is a good person or not. Based on that judgement you will decide if you want him to be your husband or not. Another way is for your family to arrange the marriage'*

**Single 17 yr old talking about how she thinks she might meet her husband**

The impact of technology was perceived as a significant intergenerational shift.

*'We have social media, and we talk to and know the condition of our friends and relatives worldwide, but they do not have that privilege. All they [mother and grandmothers] thought of was where they could get the food, they would feed their family this evening'*

**Married 22 yr old who met her husband through social media**

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<sup>56</sup> See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-fgm-fatwa-idUSKBN1FR2RA> for further details. It is important to note that the fatwa only covered Pharaonic FGM.

<sup>57</sup> The connection between SOMGEP and media consumption is extremely robust, across different media types and models, with p-values less than 0.01 in each case (see **Annex 10, Tables 31–38**).

**Box 4** provides an analysis of evidence related to SOMGEP women's perceived and realised agency and empowerment. The evidence discussed here cuts across several of the key findings already presented. To avoid repetition, we present the qualitative findings here. Direct quotes from the qualitative life history interviews are used to support our analysis.

Box 4: An overview of qualitative evidence and the wider evidence base related to agency and empowerment

#### **Decision-making, household financial control and bodily autonomy**

In many of the life history interviews we undertook; women spoke strongly of their role within their families. They often reported being in (partial) control of domestic household finances (i.e., food purchases at market); spoke of being able to move freely to market for these purchases; and expressed choices and aspirations for the future (i.e., marriage, children, vocational training, and further education). Some were also currently in further education, and a small number had chosen to divorce their husbands, choices that they very articulately made as their own: *'I was constantly telling him to give up his addiction, but he refused, so I went to my grandmother's house in the countryside, where he followed me and took a bottle of beer, and that was the last time we face each other because I took a decision.'*

And yet these types of choices were often deeply impacted, unsurprisingly, by the wider supporting environment that the women operated in. Those women who spoke of studying today clearly came from (relatively) richer households. Those that said they were divorced often spoke of the support of their own families in this choice – giving them places to stay and even paying for their healthcare. Those that reported control of domestic household finances were supported to do so by a recent history of conflict that drove women to start occupying some male spaces a generation ago, as well as the support for some (although much was later repealed) gender equality by the government. In line with the wider literature then,<sup>58</sup> we see that the decision-making spaces a SOMGEP woman can occupy are not uniform across all the domains of her life and need to be broken down and contextualised both to her wider enabling environment and her life stage.

While the women spoke of their hopes for bodily autonomy, in the form of when they would have children, and how many, this was often contrasted with them stating that ultimately they would defer to their husband's choices if it came to it. In line with this, the quantitative data revealed significantly less control over decisions on how many children to have and when to have them.

In a limited number of cases, some autonomy over decision making has been given to our participants by their mothers rather than any male family member. *'I am educated and was born and grew up in a peaceful country, they weren't educated and faced a lot of wars, so these are the differences between my childhood and their childhood. Before, girls didn't have the luxury to choose what they want or make decisions but now girls can be what they want and choose what they want. Personally, my mother allows me to take decision.'*

#### **Contrasting agency with gender norms**

Further nuance was found in the qualitative data. Women would often express strong statements of empowerment and agency for themselves, the future, and their children's futures – including the desire to undertake more education and own a business or become a medical professional. *'I am planning to continue my education when my child grows a bit. I will go to a private school and*

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<sup>58</sup> See Agarwala and Lynch 2006; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Mason and Smith 2003, for example.

*improve my English, then go to medical school and get a diploma at the university level. To enhance the quality of my life because knowledge plays a major role when planning to improve your future.'*

These statements though were often contrasted by a sense of conservatism articulated in relation to the respective roles of men and women. Acceptance that obeying a husband was a wifely duty (in Somali *Xaajiyada/xaaska wanaagsani waxeey adeecdaa xaajigeeda*) came through in 50% of the qualitative interviews: *'When it comes to religion, a woman should have good manners, faith, patience and take good care of her husband and children. After that, her honour will be noticeable, which are the traits of a good woman.'* *'She could be a good wife if she obeys her husband, cares for him, and serves him well.'* These women, as the statements above attest, often strongly express their own future choices or decisions about themselves (or their children) but also often state if their husband ultimately disagreed with their choices, they would follow his lead.

*'Before marriage I wouldn't discuss issues like the number of children that I want to have with my husband but maybe later on I would talk to him about it. If he disagrees, I will accept whatever he says and obey him.... I would accept what he says because I don't want to destroy my family. I wouldn't feel disappointed because I am a religious person, and the religion tells me that I should always obey my husband and never come against him.'*

**Single 20-year-old from Garadag**

This apparent contradiction between a sense of empowerment (related to education and employment) and conservative views of marriage and gender roles was also reflected in the quantitative data. For instance, nearly all women (96.1%) in the sample expressed a desire to work in the future, but most women would ultimately allow their husband or parents to decide whether they take a job in the present.<sup>59</sup> More generally, 76.2% of women agreed that a wife should obey her husband, even if she disagrees.

As seen in the quantitative data, religion and culture were cited as reasons to continue undertaking FGM/C. Religion and culture were also given as reasons that women needed to 'obey' their husbands. This could be driven by the rise of the externally supported Madrassa schools, which a number of these women attended, often in parallel to their secular education.

### **Conservatism & the impact of Madrassas**

*'In the past, I used to believe negative things about school because I often used to hear stuff like girls and boys studying together. When I was pretty young, I used to hear girls who attended schools being mistreated as if they were dead women because they learned alongside boys. So, I used to think school was a big problem because the environment always seemed to say things about girls like "why'd they sit with the boys?". Our Madrassa teacher fought us hard to attend school for three years, declaring "Choose between me or the school". And so, it took us three years to persuade him to let us go to school, which set us back three years. He was always saying, "did you guys choose to go to the formal school after I taught you for the past few years?" As well since he believed bad things from school, no student who went to the formal schools was ever allowed to come to madrassa'*

**Unmarried Student from Haji Salah**

Making sense of what these seemingly contradictory views tell us about the impact of education on SOMGEP women points to the need to contextualise within the wider environment and associated

<sup>59</sup> Single women are more likely (79%) to defer to their parents on this decision, while married women express slightly more control vis-à-vis their husbands. Still, in cases in which a woman and her husband disagreed about her taking a job outside the household, 41.7% of women expect that their husband's preferences would prevail.



drivers. In particular, to consider the legacy of shifts that have occurred over time. Our PEA highlighted how a more liberal socialist phase in the 1970s may well have opened opportunities for the mothers of our participants – paving the way for more aspirational futures for their daughters. However, the backlash to more radical gender change appears to come from both within and externally to Somaliland – with the advent of externally funded Madrassas pushing conservative views on gender and gender roles such as those cited above and here: *'The Madrassa teachers preach about the religion... They advised us to wear hijab, lower our voice when speaking, and obey our husbands.'*

Religious education was seen as crucially important by many of our participants, who often said they believed that religious education was more important than secular education and if there was only one choice for them or their children, they would choose the former.

### 4.3. Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes: Key Findings

In this section, we address our original RQ1, focused on understanding the relationship between early-life characteristics and eventual life outcomes of SOMGEP women. Our goal is to understand whether outcomes observed among girls and their households in 2015/16 – when they ranged from 8 to 16 years old – successfully predict important later-life outcomes, such as the age at which they marry, their educational attainment, and their attitudes toward IPV.

We present findings below organised by outcome, such as educational attainment or marital outcomes. To avoid repetition, note that each analysis uses a similar approach and the same data: we make use of data collected from SOMGEP women in 2015/16 and data collected in 2022 from the same women (n=408), linking their characteristics and outcomes across time. In each case, we analyse the relationship between the dependent variable (in 2022) as a function of predictors or independent variables (collected in 2015/16) using linear regression).<sup>60</sup> Throughout our analysis, we cluster standard errors by school.<sup>61</sup> Additional details on model specification are provided in **Annex 10**, while information on the measurement of present-day outcomes and early-life predictors is provided in **Annex 5**.

**Diagram 3** provides an overview of key findings on the impact of early childhood characteristics on current life outcomes.

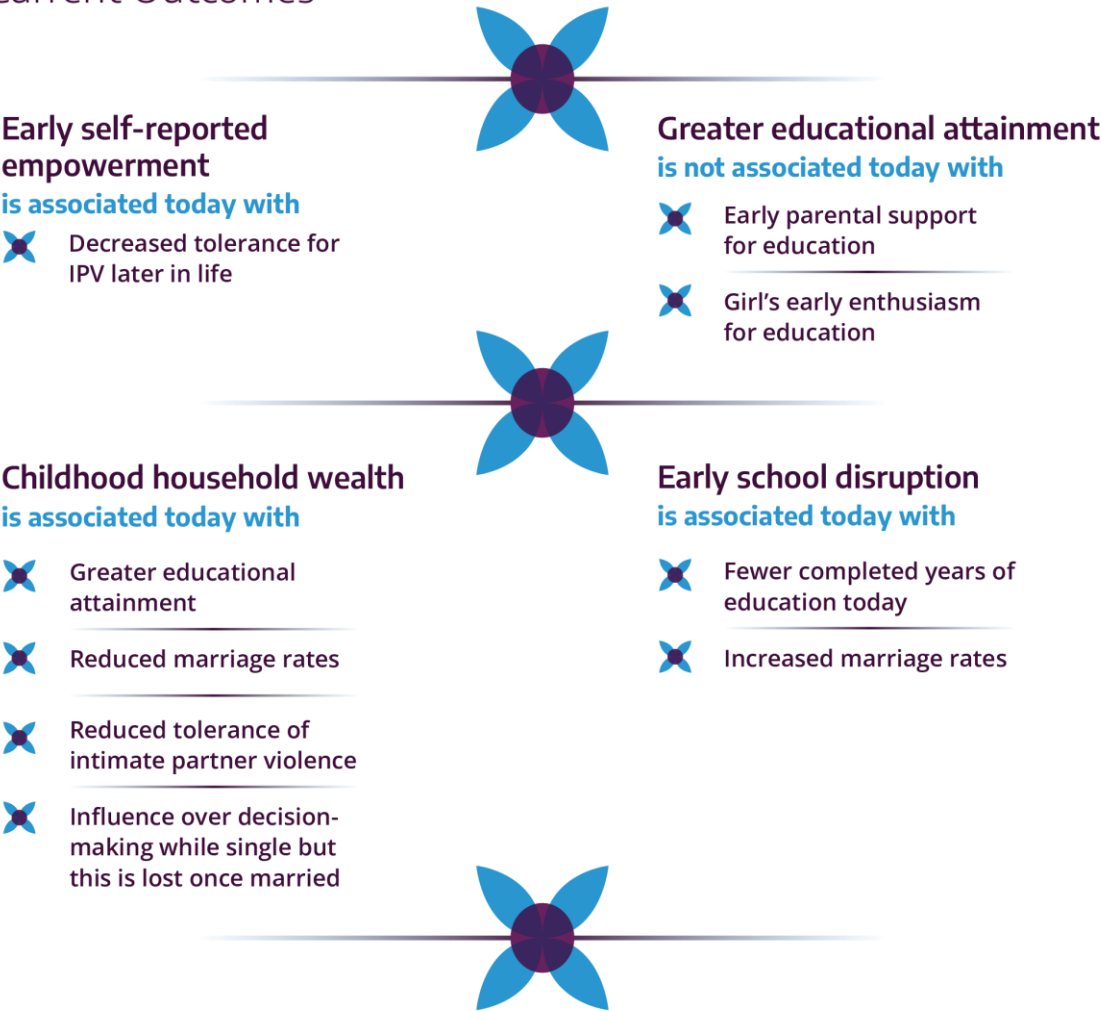
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<sup>60</sup> These models control for the woman's region of origin in 2015/16, her age, and other demographic characteristics. Depending on the outcome, we also control for confounding childhood factors that also predict later outcomes. Importantly, however, we *do not* control for present-day factors, because present-day factors are "post-treatment." In other words, present-day factors can themselves be considered outcomes of childhood factors and should not be controlled for in regression models.

<sup>61</sup> As the methodology annex makes clear, the present-day survey was not clustered in the traditional sense, as women have migrated and selection into the sample was not in any way a function of their geographic location. However, we expect outcomes to be correlated within *original* villages – i.e., the villages in which the women lived in 2015/16 – which provides the rationale for accounting for clustering.

Diagram 3: Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes

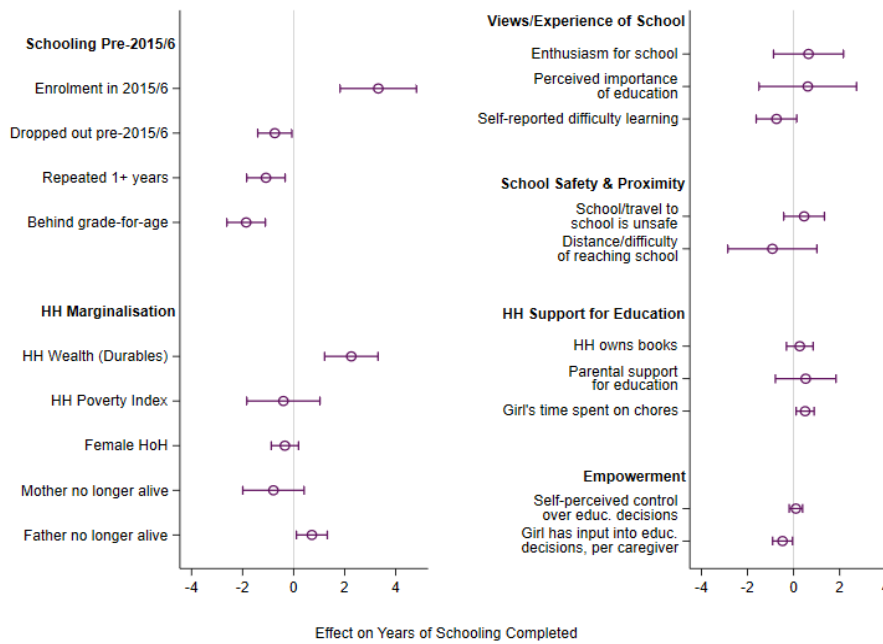
## Early-Life Predictors of Current Outcomes



### 4.3.1. Do early childhood personal and household characteristics influence completed years of education for SOMGEP women today?

**Graph 2** highlights several childhood characteristics (including schooling, marginalisation, household support for education and empowerment, etc.) on completed years of education. Comprehensive results underlying **Graph 2** are available in **Annex 10, Table 41**.

Graph 2: Effect of early-life (2015/16) characteristics on educational attainment<sup>62</sup>



**Early educational limitations, such as grade repetition and being older than average for your school year, are shown to result in fewer completed years of education today**

The first result that emerges from **Graph 2** is the impact of educational shortcomings in early life. Women who were enrolled when surveyed in 2015/16 complete 3.3 additional years of schooling, on average. Even those who were enrolled in 2015/16 but had experienced a previous period of dropping out are affected, and complete 0.74 fewer education years. Grade repetition early in one’s educational career and falling behind for one’s age are also strongly associated with worse aggregate educational attainment. This finding highlights the importance of consistency in schooling: for most Somali girls, there is a limited age window during which they are likely to remain in school, so starting late, repeating grades, and experiencing disruptions in enrolment have long-running impacts that are difficult to correct.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The figure reports results from a regression predicting years of completed schooling, where each dot and horizontal bar indicates the relationship between an independent variable and years of completed schooling (dot), along with the 95% confidence interval (horizontal bar) around the estimated relationship. Where the horizontal bar does not intersect with the vertical line at 0, the relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>63</sup> In our sample, enrolment falls consistently from ages 15 to 21, with especially sharp declines as girls reach age 18. Even this is exceptional because – as we show later in this report – SOMGEP was associated with girls remaining in school longer than a comparable sample of Somali girls. Among a large national sample collected in 2019, enrolment among girls began a slow decline at age 13 and declined consistently through age 18.

## **Overall, household wealth during childhood and early adolescence is associated with greater long-run educational attainment**

Early household wealth – as comprised of ownership of household assets and the quality of one’s home – strongly predicts eventual educational attainment.<sup>64</sup> Shorter-run poverty measures (such as household hunger, access to clean water, and the occupational status of adults in the household), have no discernible relationship with overall educational attainment. We interpret this finding to reflect the fact that education is an investment that occurs over many years and requires consistency. While short-term shocks may inhibit enrolment in the moment, households with stronger financial footing are better able to weather such shocks – either bringing their children back into school quickly after the shock ends or maintaining enrolment through the shock by drawing down household assets. In contrast, chronically poor households – for instance, those living in structurally unsound or smaller abodes – are less equipped to weather short-term shocks, disrupting schooling and contributing to lower overall education in the long-run.<sup>65</sup>

## **Many individual-level factors – such as a girl’s enthusiasm or parental support for education – are uncorrelated with greater educational attainment later in life**

There are several factors linked theoretically or logically to greater educational attainment that do not appear to increase completed schooling in the context of this study.<sup>66</sup> One surprising finding, consistent across either the full sample or the set of girls who were enrolled in 2015/16, is that a girl’s empowerment and enthusiasm for school is only slightly predictive of greater completed schooling. For instance, as shown in the right panel of **Graph 2**, girls who express more enthusiasm for school complete 0.33 (full sample) or 0.22 (subsample of those enrolled) more years of schooling, but this finding does not approach any conventional level of statistical significance. A girl’s sense of control over her educational decisions is even less correlated with long-run education and is not statistically significant. Other measures of empowerment or influence over decision-making are also unrelated to

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<sup>64</sup> While the effect size of household wealth varies across models, it is always associated with increased educational attainment, with  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>65</sup> It is important to emphasise that nearly every household in the sample was poor by most standards, especially given SOMGEP’s focus on relatively remote rural villages and pastoralist communities. For instance, very few households have access to cash – either via savings or leveraging their social networks – more than \$300.

<sup>66</sup> The most straightforward hypothesis is that a girl’s self-reported enthusiasm for education or belief that education is important for her future happiness and goals should affect her enrolment and long-run educational attainment, which is a straightforward hypothesis. Slightly less direct is the argument that empowerment or self-confidence should affect educational attainment, although this claim often underlies educational interventions. For instance, the SOMGEP-Transition’s ToC implies that girls’ empowerment – in the form of input and influence over decisions related to their schooling – should encourage their continued enrolment. Positive parental attitudes toward education are more explicitly linked to enrolment and educational attainment in many programme ToCs and also found in the empirical literature on education – see, for instance: Zhao, Meng, and Paul Glewwe. 2010. “What Determines Basic School Attainment in Developing Countries? Evidence from Rural China.” *Economics of Education Review* 29 (3): 451-460.

completed schooling: a girl whose caregiver, in 2015/16, reported that they consider the girl's views when making schooling decisions tends to have completed *less* schooling by 2022, all else equal.<sup>67</sup>

Teaching quality – as captured through admittedly imperfect measures – and physical proximity to the school also do not have the effects we would expect.<sup>68</sup> For instance, physical barriers to reaching the school are not correlated with educational attainment. Similarly surprising is the finding that women who, in 2015/16, reported that their teacher used corporal punishment or harsh language with them complete *more* schooling, on average. For instance, women who agreed that their teacher used corporal punishment completed 0.64 additional years of schooling, all else equal. We do not have an explanation for this finding, but it stands in contrast to many programming assumptions and may be worth additional research. Other measures of teaching quality – such as teacher absenteeism and teaching style – are uncorrelated with total schooling completed.<sup>69</sup> These trends seem to confirm that larger structural barriers to educational attainment dominate, and issues of girls' empowerment and teaching quality are of secondary importance in this respect.<sup>70</sup>

### **Parent's educational attainment predicts increased levels of completed schooling, but this relationship is clearest in the case of a father's education**

In contrast to the null results above, parental schooling is associated with increased education, but this relationship is somewhat weak. Women whose fathers completed more

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<sup>67</sup> While the 2015/16 measures of empowerment focus on a girl's self-perceived control over decision-making related to education and reports from her caregiver on how educational decisions are made, this certainly does not capture all aspects of empowerment that can influence overall educational attainment. It is possible that a finer-grained measure of empowerment would better predict schooling completed, an issue that we cannot resolve with the available data.

<sup>68</sup> Distance to school is often cited as a driver of poor school attendance and low enrolment rates in rural Africa: see, e.g., Vuri, Daniela 2010. "The Effect of Availability of School and Distance to School on Children's Time Allocation in Ghana." *Labour* 24: 46–75. In contrast, it is less common to argue that teaching quality explicitly drives enrolment or educational attainment, though this linkage is often implicit in arguments around the importance of teacher demeanour and creating a welcoming environment for female students (in particular within GEC and GEC-Transition programming).

<sup>69</sup> Teaching quality is difficult to capture through surveys of students and parents and the 2015/16 data on teaching quality focused primarily on a teacher's demeanour in the classroom, rather than specific pedagogical practices. Therefore, the fact that teaching quality does not predict greater educational attainment should be taken with a grain of salt. In addition, as we note elsewhere in this section, the quality of teaching in a single year may not predict educational attainment, but consistent exposure to either high- or low-quality teaching may have an impact; unfortunately, our data only allows us to analyse the effect of teaching quality (as measured) at a specific point in time.

<sup>70</sup> Of course, teaching quality likely shapes the value of any education one achieves, but this is separate from the question of whether girls remain in school and for how long.

schooling also complete more schooling themselves: for instance, when a father has completed primary school, his daughter typically completes 0.86 additional years of schooling, compared to a father who did not attend school at all. This relationship is more complicated in the case of mothers: as with fathers, the most educated mothers tend to produce more educated daughters; however, the *least* educated mothers also produce educated daughters, with mothers in the middle range of educational achievement producing the least-educated daughters, on average. This finding regarding uneducated mothers may be a result of the time and context, as mothers of SOMGEP women were of primary school age during a period of intense civil conflict, but it remains surprising considering global evidence around the correlation of educational attainment across generations.<sup>71</sup>

#### 4.3.2. Do early childhood personal and household characteristics influence marriage choices for SOMGEP women today?

##### **Household wealth and parental support for education reduce marriage rates, while disruption of schooling during adolescence increases marriage rates**

Among Somali women, marriage and educational outcomes are closely related, with marriage often the proximate cause of leaving school. Among SOMGEP women we surveyed, those who are or have been married,<sup>72</sup> complete just over two years less of education, after factoring in their region and age group. Given this correlation, it is not surprising that many of the same childhood factors that predict lower educational attainment also predict which women will be married. In other words, if a childhood characteristic is correlated with worse long-run educational attainment, it also tends to be correlated with a higher likelihood of marriage.

To illustrate, women who had fallen behind in school in 2015/16 tend to have completed less schooling by 2022 and are 13.1 percentage points more likely to be married. Household wealth also reduces marriage rates. Furthermore, women who enjoyed greater parental support for education are also much less likely (by 18.1 percentage points) to be married, all

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<sup>71</sup> Following the mass literacy drives of the 1970s, conflict in Somaliland in the 1980s and early 1990s caused mass displacement and there was limited government support for education. Among women of this generation, there may be many who valued education and came from well-off, educated households, who simply had no opportunity to attend school. This would weaken and distort any statistical relationship between the education of a mother and her daughter.

<sup>72</sup> Throughout this section we refer informally to women “being married”, though we include divorced and widowed women in defining our outcome of interest. As in the previous section, we use linear regression to study the rate at which women have ever been married. While marriage is not necessarily a negative outcome, depending on one’s age, given the age range of our sample (concentrated between 15 and 22 years), we feel comfortable classifying any marriages among this group as earlier-than-optimal.

else equal.<sup>73</sup> The most straightforward interpretation of these results links marriage and educational outcomes. Household wealth and parental support simultaneously increase educational attainment and reduce early marriage rates; falling behind in school increases the likelihood of marriage and reduces overall schooling achieved.<sup>74</sup> As in the qualitative data collection, wealthier, more pro-education households allow women to remain in school and offset one key source of pressure women feel to drop out at an early age – the need to marry.

### **SOMGEP women who have married do so at a younger age than their mothers and other older female relatives, despite stating that marrying at an older age is preferable**

Although our data from 2015/16 did not capture information on when each SOMGEP woman's parents married, we asked them in 2022 how their age at marriage compared to that of their mother or aunts. Among ever-married women (n=108) in the sample, 58.3% report that they married at a younger age than their mothers and aunts did. At the same time, they tend to recommend, when presented with a hypothetical young woman who is considering marriage, waiting somewhat longer. While the average age at marriage of ever-married women is 17.3 years, the same women cited 19.1 years as the “best age” to marry.

The fact that women self-report earlier marriages than their mothers *and* would recommend somewhat later marriage to others suggests that this set of women have gotten married earlier than they might have wished. It is not clear what factors explain the trend toward earlier marriage, though it is possible that recurrent drought, particularly severe in 2017, drove women to marry earlier than they otherwise would. Importantly, however, we cannot establish that SOMGEP women are marrying younger than their mothers overall, because our sample of married women is small and restricted to those who self-selected into marriage at a relatively young age.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, our sample includes many women 20 years or older who are unmarried, and – as we showed in **Section 4.2** – SOMGEP women are less likely to be married than a comparison group of the same age. It is possible that SOMGEP women are simultaneously marrying earlier than their mothers but marrying later, on average, than other Somali women.

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<sup>73</sup> This finding is especially notable because the impact of parental support for education on marriage outcomes is greater than its impact on educational attainment. This finding is marginally significant, at the 10 percent level (see **Annex 10, Table 42.**)

<sup>74</sup> Our analysis confirmed this linkage empirically: once we incorporate aggregate educational attainment into our model, the relationship between these three variables and marriage rates largely dissipates, suggesting that household wealth and parental support for education affect marriage outcomes via their impact on education.

<sup>75</sup> Naturally, these women are more likely to have married younger than their mothers than those who remain unmarried – the latter will be, by definition, older when they marry, and may be more likely to be older than their mothers/aunts.

The qualitative data seems to support these generational differences with a large number reporting their mothers married at a later age than they had. Clear differences emerged when SOMGEP participants spoke of generational change, around perceptions of their parents living in conflict and by contrast them living in peace, of their parents not having access to health or education infrastructure etc. They also reported mothers marrying later to allow for time to support their families financially, which is perhaps a reflection of the conflict of that time and the historic changing role of women in society. It is not known - although, perhaps, a reasonable assumption - that some of these later parental marriages were a result of the impact and dislocations caused by conflict. It is also reasonable to assume that some of the existing SOMGEP marriages today have been because of, or influenced by, the (lack of) household wealth and a need to marry as a result.

*'My mother was older than me when she married. And I believe that nowadays, people are marrying at a younger age, which I believe is a negative change because in the past, people married when they were mature, but now they may marry at a younger age, which may lead to family breakdown.'*

#### **Divorced, mother of one from Yucob Yaboh**

Married women also express preferences for later marriage than they experienced. Among married women, the median age at marriage was 17 years; however, when presented with a scenario involving their young niece, these same women reported that 20 years was the ideal age for a girl to marry. In contrast, unmarried women tend to believe that they will wait to get married - on average, they hope to marry at the age of 23.2 years, and the majority (66%) believe they will marry at an older age than their mothers. This is in line with the qualitative data collection where single women would often project forward a good time to marry (i.e., 25 years of age) and yet, stated that they would like their children younger.

#### **4.3.3. Do early childhood personal and household characteristics influence intra-household decision-making for adult SOMGEP women today?**

If it is anticipated that household wealth and parental support for education influence later marital decisions, and create a more equitable enabling environment, it is reasonable to ask whether these factors also shape an adult woman's influence within her household. We tested the predictors of female influence over decisions, defining decision-making influence in the context of four decisions (unmarried women) and six decisions (married or previously married women), respectively. Higher scores on our index - which ranges from 0 to 1 - indicate influence over more decisions and greater - i.e., sole versus joint control - influence over those decisions.

#### **Self-perceived control over decisions in childhood does not follow through to greater reported influence over decisions as adults**

Women's empowerment in our sample is strongly correlated with age, with older women enjoying much greater control over household decisions. The level of control women felt



they had as girls, in 2015/16, is not correlated with their control over household decisions as adults. We could reasonably anticipate women who felt control over educational decisions at a young age to continue to exert a relatively greater degree of influence over decisions as adults. However, this is not the case, regardless of how we split our sample or how influence over household decisions are modelled.<sup>76</sup> Based on qualitative evidence from other educational evaluations, we would also expect women who grew up in households without their mother or in the households of aunts or uncles, to have less power as adults, owing largely to their lower household status.<sup>77</sup> However, we find only limited evidence for this; furthermore, the relationship between a mother's presence and later control over household decision-making is far from statistically significant.

### **The strongest predictor of single women's influence over decision-making today is childhood household wealth, yet once married, this influence dissipates**

Unmarried SOMGEP women – who typically live with their parents or other responsible adults – in more prosperous households enjoy greater self-perceived influence over decision-making, holding constant their age and other factors. A one-standard deviation change in household wealth is associated with a 0.31 standard deviation change in a woman's control over household decision-making, though this relationship is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.14$ ). Importantly, though, this relationship only holds within a woman's parental household. But once a woman is married, the wealth of her childhood household has no relationship with her intra-household power. In other words, wealthier parents empower their daughters at home, and they perhaps are more confident to express their self-determined desires in this 'safe' space, but women from wealthier households do not maintain this control once they leave their households.

#### **4.3.4. Do early childhood personal and household characteristics influence tolerance for IPV among adult women?**

Building on the findings regarding female control over decision-making, we now consider whether childhood personal and household characteristics influence tolerance for IPV among adult women. We define tolerance for IPV as an index (0–3), which is simply the number of scenarios – out of three possible – in which a woman thinks it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife; thus, higher scores indicate a greater tolerance for IPV. **Graph 3** below

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<sup>76</sup> See **Annex 10, Tables 44** and **45** for full results.

<sup>77</sup> See the qualitative evidence collected as part of, e.g., CARE International. 2022. "The Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme – Transition: Endline Evaluation Report."

highlights a select set of relationships between childhood characteristics and tolerance for IPV, controlling for age and region.<sup>78</sup>

### **Childhood household wealth reduces a woman's tolerance of IPV, which we view as a necessary step toward wider behaviour and social norms changes**

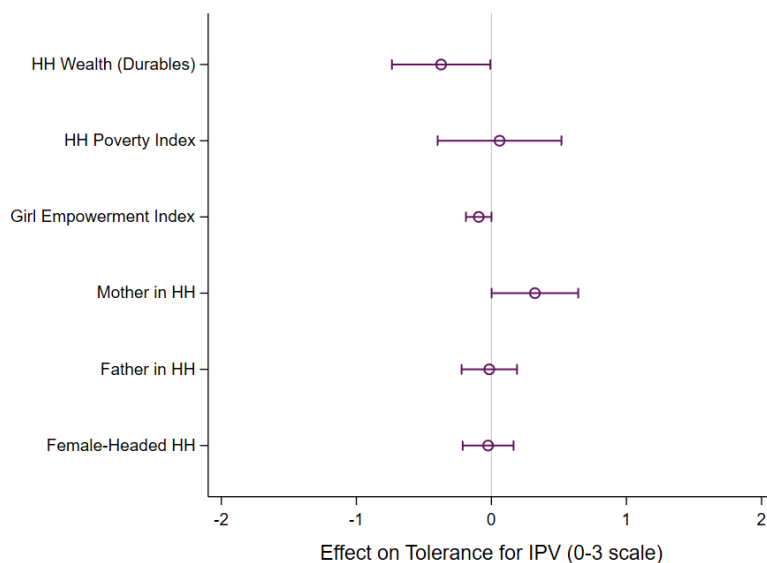
Household wealth is an important predictor for female attitudes toward IPV, with women from wealthier households less likely to express tolerance for IPV. The average (mean) woman in our sample, if her childhood home was in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of household wealth, would accept violence in 0.55 of the three scenarios presented (i.e., scores 0.55 on our index). If the same woman grew up in a household in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of household wealth, our model suggests she would tolerate violence in just 0.39 of the scenarios presented (0.39 on our index) – a sizable reduction, given the already low tolerance of IPV. Critically, the relationship between childhood household wealth and lower tolerance of IPV holds – and becomes stronger – among married women who no longer live in their parent's households. That is, in contrast to control over household decision-making, relative wealth as a child continues to shape female views of IPV as adults. Both single and married women are less tolerant of IPV if they grew up in a wealthier household.

It is important to note that we measure stated tolerance of IPV, rather than prevalence of IPV. Our data does not allow us to say whether childhood household wealth or childhood empowerment (as discussed in the next section) reduces the prevalence of IPV or leads women to take actions – such as divorce or reporting to the police – in response to IPV. However, we see reduced tolerance of IPV as a necessary – but not sufficient – step toward wider behaviour and social norms change – changes that are needed in the longer term to reduce violence against women overall.

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<sup>78</sup> Full results underlying the graph are available in **Annex 10, Table 46**.

Graph 3: Relationship between early-life characteristics and current tolerance of IPV<sup>79</sup>



### Self-reported empowerment at a young age decreases tolerance for IPV later in life

Outside of household wealth, few childhood factors predict attitudes toward IPV later in life. Two exceptions stand out in the previous figure. Negatively, women whose adolescent households included their mothers express greater tolerance for IPV. More positively, girls who perceive themselves to have greater influence over educational decisions as children or teenagers (in 2015/16) are moderately less tolerant of IPV as they get older.<sup>80</sup> This is shown in the result related to the Girls' Empowerment Index, though this pattern is somewhat sensitive to our modelling choices.<sup>81</sup> One possible interpretation of this pattern is that self-confidence and perceived control over one's own life during childhood carries over into adulthood and gives women the sense that they do not need to accept violence. In contrast to the earlier findings regarding intra-household decision-making, this effect holds among married women – those who were more empowered in 2015/16 are less tolerant of IPV

<sup>79</sup> Each dot represents a regression coefficient, the relationship between the variable on the left and tolerance for IPV. The horizontal bar represents the 95% confidence interval around each estimated relationship. Where a bar does not intersect the vertical line at 0, the relationship is statistically significant.

<sup>80</sup> As noted in the previous section, our analysis is focused on stated tolerance of IPV, rather than the prevalence of IPV. Reducing female tolerance of IPV is, in our view, a necessary indicator toward wider social change, but our data cannot reveal whether childhood empowerment reduces the prevalence of IPV.

<sup>81</sup> In several alternative models, the relationship between empowerment as an adolescent and tolerance for IPV today is, alternately, statistically significant, and insignificant, with p-values ranging from 0.05 to 0.13. While this variation reduces our confidence in the result slightly, the fact that the finding consistently approaches or meets thresholds for significance suggests that there is an association between the two variables, but one which is too weak or too noisy to be detected consistently in our relatively small sample.

today. Whether lower stated tolerance for IPV translates into a reduction in IPV, in practice, is unclear, but eliminating the social acceptability of IPV is an important outcome.

#### 4.3.5. Do parental attitudes to education predict support of children's education / development?

##### **Support for investing in children's education weakly linked to SOMGEP women's own educational attainment**

One commonly cited argument in support of girls' education is that better-educated women directly improve the learning outcomes of their own children, either by making investments in early childhood development or through their own, greater support for formal education.<sup>82</sup> In our sample, there is relatively little evidence that greater education increases a woman's stated desire to invest time in her child's early cognitive development, in the form of reading, playing games, and singing songs with them frequently.

More surprising is the relatively weak link between a woman's childhood attitudes toward education (and those of her parents), on one hand, and her attitudes in the present. Because educational attainment is determined by several factors, a girl's enthusiasm for education may have limited impact on her own level of schooling. However, we would hope that this enthusiasm would remain later in life and encourage greater investment in education for her children. Unfortunately, as **Graph 4** demonstrates, this is not generally the case. The left panel of the figure plots the attitudes of young women and their parents in 2015/16 against the same women's support for investing in early childhood development for existing or future children in 2022. Women who expressed enthusiasm for school and who stated a firm belief in the importance and value of education in 2015/16 are only slightly more supportive of investing in their child's cognitive development. Parental support for girls' education, as measured in 2015/16, also does not affect their daughter's later views of their children's early childhood development.

The right panel of the figure reinforces these findings, focusing on present-day support for girls' education. While childhood household wealth predicts more pro-education views (bottom result, right panel), a woman's own views on education from 2015/16 – e.g., whether she felt education was important – are entirely uncorrelated with her views in 2022.<sup>83</sup>

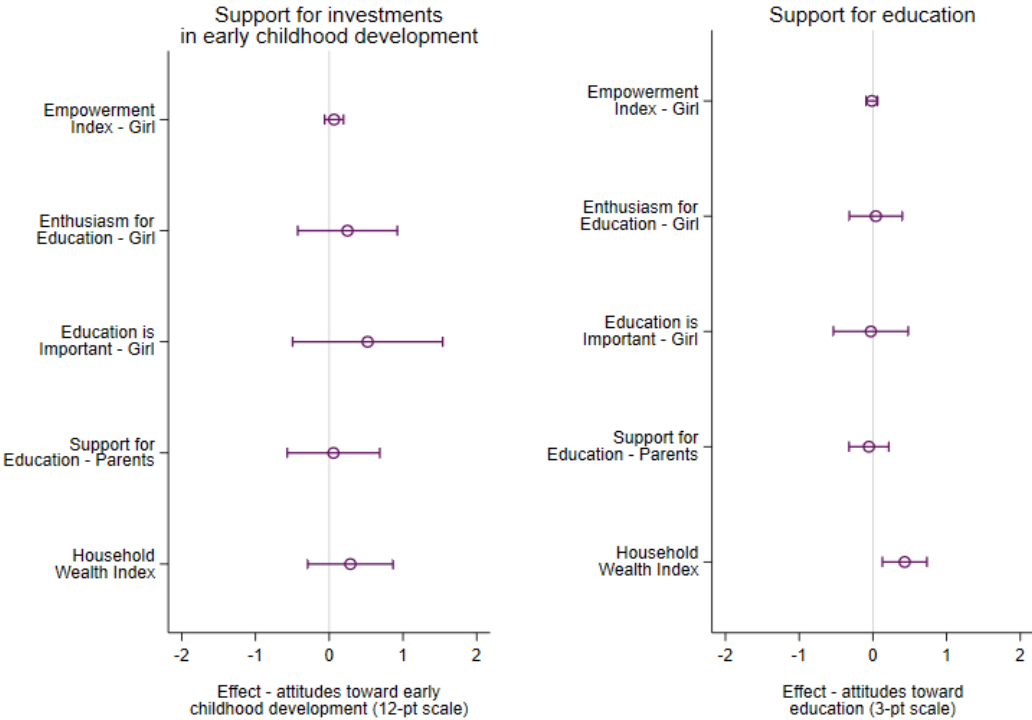
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<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Egevberra, Yvette. 2017. "Girl child marriage as a risk factor for early childhood development and stunting." *Social Science and Medicine* 185: 91-101; Cuartas, Jorge. 2022. "The effect of maternal education on parenting and early childhood development: An instrumental variables approach." *Journal of Family Psychology* 36 (2): 280-290; Cui, Ying, Hong Liu, and Liqiu Zhao. 2019. "Mother's education and child development: Evidence from the compulsory school reform in China." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 47 (3): 669-692.

<sup>83</sup> It is important to note that the questions used to capture a girl's beliefs regarding the importance and value of education in 2015/16 differ from those used to capture her support for education in 2022. In the latter case, we employ more tangible questions, using scenarios that force respondents to choose between, for instance,

Whether a woman was enthusiastic about her own education or believed in the importance of education in 2015/16 has no relationship to her support for girls' education today (right panel). To illustrate with one measure of present support for education extracted from the broader index reported in the figure, a woman who believed education was important for her own life in 2015/16 is *more* likely to suggest her niece should drop out of school and accept a marriage proposal at age 16.

Graph 4: Relationship between early-life characteristics and attitudes toward early childhood development (left panel) and girls' education (right panel)<sup>84</sup>



4.3.6. Does early childhood wealth translate into household wealth today?

**Early household wealth does not translate into household wealth today**

We find no evidence that household wealth or economic status of a woman's childhood home in 2015/16 is associated with better economic outcomes in her own household

enrolling their daughter in school or selling an animal to make ends meet. Nonetheless, we would expect pro-education views in one period to be associated with pro-education views in the other.

<sup>84</sup> Results from the full models underlying this graph are available in **Annex 10, Table 47**. Each dot represents a regression coefficient, the relationship between the variable along the left axis and support for investing time in early childhood education (left panel) or education more generally (right panel). The horizontal bar represents the 95% confidence interval around each estimated relationship. Where a bar does not intersect the vertical line at 0, the relationship is statistically significant. The coefficients in the left panel are all drawn from a single regression that incorporates all the independent variables listed, as well as controls; likewise, the coefficients in the right panel are all drawn from a single regression.

today<sup>85</sup>. Household wealth in 2015/16 is correlated with better economic outcomes today but only *within the same* household, i.e., for women who remain in the households of their parents or older relatives. This implies that the correlation exists because wealth has been retained within the same households over time – women do not take wealth with them or generate more wealth in their marital homes.

In contrast, among women who have left their childhood households – either via marriage or otherwise – childhood household wealth does not predict better economic outcomes. In short, wealth remains within the same household but is not transmitted across generations when women leave their childhood households.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that SOMGEP women are at such an early stage in their lives that inter-generational wealth transmission has not had an impact yet, and they may accumulate assets at a faster rate as they age than peers from less-wealthy families. However, at present, they do not appear to have any advantage in terms of economic outcomes. Again and again, the qualitative interviews spoke of the desire to contribute financially to their families but significantly also realising how a lack of financial resources limited their aspirations, agency, and achievement in life. As one woman spoke: *'Financial insecurity may limit my ability to exercise power.'*

**Box 5** provides an overview of some of the key qualitative findings and importance of intergenerational differences.

#### Box 5: Qualitative evidence on intergenerational differences

Intergenerational differences became a stronger focus of our study, following a collection of data which highlighted two key factors: the importance of older female relatives in the lives of SOMGEP women, as support and role models today, and intergenerational differences in education levels, access to resources and perceptions of life.

Our qualitative life history narratives reveal an acknowledgement across all participants that they have experienced better life outcomes than their mothers, and a hope that these will improve even further for their children.

*'My mother did not have the opportunity to learn because there were conflicts at the time, there were no mobile phones, and there were not enough clothes. While I had the opportunity to learn and was living in peace, I also found water.'*

**20-year-old from Dalmare, living with widowed mother who runs her own business**

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<sup>85</sup> We measured economic outcomes in 2022 through a combination of consumption and spending patterns (consumption of meat; ability to give to charity during Ramadan), ability to raise funds during an emergency, and livestock ownership. Household wealth in 2015/16 is primarily a measure of durable assets, such as ownership of a radio and the quality of home construction. Different wealth measurement strategies stem from the fact that we consider present-day wealth to be of secondary interest as an outcome, and we sought to reduce the total survey space dedicated to its measurement in 2022. In addition, our survey made use of improved (and simplified) measures of household wealth that we have refined over the course of completing many projects in Somalia and Somaliland.

<sup>86</sup> See **Annex 10, Table 48** for full regression results documenting these patterns.

A consistent, near universal, theme of the qualitative interviews was the difference in education levels between SOMGEP women today and their mothers and grandmothers:

*'There is a difference, in the past people were nomads and they did not study, although my mother had learned something, current education is always better than theirs. My life and my grandparents' lives are different. We live in cities while they lived in rural areas. We also have a better education than they did.'*

**19-year-old single woman from Kridh**

Their mothers and grandmothers' lives were often seen through a prism of rural pastoralism and conflict. Many reflected on the lack of opportunity their mothers and grandmothers had due to dislocations of war, living internally displaced people camps, the rural/ urban divide, and a lack of basic services – including education and health facilities. Many also spoke of having more spaces to play and things to play with than their predecessors, who they cited as not having time either to play. They all noted and spoke positively of the opportunities they had had because of going to school, both secular and Islamic.

*'My goals and aspirations are different from the goals and aspirations of my mother and grandmother. My goal is to continue making progress and to take my role in this modernised world just like the others. I would like to be independent and have my own business, but my mother and grandmother's goal was to get married since they weren't educated and didn't have the ability to make business since they lived in rural areas.'*

**Married woman from Hargeisa**

Despite this perception of a gap in what their mothers and grandmothers experienced before them, most women spoke of how important their mothers were to them in their daily lives, and as inspirations or role models for their futures. Many cited how their mothers contributed economically to the household, through small business and working more broadly. Some commented how their mothers had put off marrying to become financially secure or took over their late father's businesses when they passed away. Like their mothers before them, many explicitly stated that they want to be educated further and/or get a job or small business to contribute to their families.

Our participants were clear in their aspirations for their children – wanting them to achieve more than they had themselves. The strength in how participants spoke about their aspirations for their children should be seen as an indication of agency and a legacy of SOMGEP.

Decision-making was linked to greater opportunities, with many sharing how they had more life chances than their mothers and so in turn more choices themselves. *"My goals and objectives in this life aren't the same as those of my grandmother. My goal was to get educated, work and become independent, think of my future, and get married, have nice children, and marry a good father for my children."* Yet the women also repeatedly acknowledged that the above described choices, aspirations, and decisions would be influenced and/or decided by their husband or future husband, and cultural and social norms. Our participants spoke of the advantages of marriage in a way that suggested they were not held back from making different choices to their mothers even if they married at a young age. Divorce was also an option some of our participants had taken and spoke of being welcomed back to their parents' home even with children.

Also, several of our participants shared how they had found their own husband. *'I was in Hargeisa when we first met. We met through social media, especially Facebook. We got to know each other, and our love reached the point of moving to the next step, marriage. Finally, we got married. Before we married, I checked his behaviour and manners, and now we are married and living together.'*

## 4.4. Perception of Programme Impacts: Key Findings

In this section, we analyse the programme's overarching impact, based on the perceived impacts reported by SOMGEP participants. In contrast to **Section 4.2**, which attempted to measure SOMGEP's impact against a comparison group of unexposed women, this section looks at the impacts SOMGEP participants *themselves* felt the programme had, retrospectively.<sup>87</sup>

Unless otherwise noted, results in this section are based on the sub-set of our sample of former participants who recalled the SOMGEP programme by name (n=240). All respondents are verified programme participants, although there is variation in the length of their exposure and the specific inputs or benefits that they received. One caveat to the findings in this section is that respondents who recall participating in the programme (n=240) may have more positive views of its impact than those who do not recall it at all. The results should be understood as representing self-perceived impacts among those who recall the programme.<sup>88</sup>

Our analysis is generally descriptive and cross-sectional, reporting overall perceptions and disaggregated perceptions by marital status, employment experience, and other characteristics that might shape perceptions.<sup>89</sup> We also compare perceived programme

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<sup>87</sup> It is important to distinguish between self-perceived impacts, as reported by respondents after the end of the programme, and impacts derived from comparing programme beneficiaries to a control group. The former – the focus of this section – asks respondents about the impact of the programme on their lives (e.g., whether the programme gave them greater self-confidence), which requires respondents to make causal judgments. While often difficult and prone to misattribution, we view these responses as informative regarding the programme's overall value (as perceived by respondents); moreover, causal judgments of this kind are more viable in particular cases, such as assessing whether the programme provided useful skills or increased their self-confidence. Nonetheless, the results in this section need to be interpreted considering the possibility that respondents are less-than-perfect judges of a programme's impact on their own lives. Rather than a definitive statement of programme impact, the results provide one further assessment of the programme's value and allow us to analyse variation in perceived impact across subgroups.

<sup>88</sup> Enumerators briefly described the programme using its local name and the period during which it was implemented, before asking respondents whether they recall participating. Practically, if respondents do not recall participating, they cannot attribute impact to the programme or indicate whether the programme provided them with useful skills.

<sup>89</sup> We employ regression models in two ways in this section. First, we test whether perceived programme impact varies as a function of childhood characteristics, particularly household economic status in 2015/16. Because SOMGEP targeted marginalised households, it is worth asking whether the programme had particularly strong effects among this subgroup. This analysis is very similar in structure to that in Section 4.3, linking early-life characteristics from 2015/16 to outcomes measured in 2022. Second, we use regression models to test the association between a variety of current characteristics (such as educational attainment and migration to urban



impacts with other factors such as agency and empowerment (including control over employment, marriage, and household finances). Key findings are given in **Diagram 4**.

Diagram 4: Self-perceived Impacts of SOMGEP Participation

## Self-perceived Impacts of SOMGEP Participation

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Many reported SOMGEP gave them useful skills but those who were / are employed are less likely to view these skills as useful



Divorced & widowed women reported greater value of SOMGEP in terms of increased confidence & value of skills generated



Marginalised women reported the strongest overall impacts of SOMGEP



SOMGEP women are more likely to report control over household decision-making but less over decisions related to bodily autonomy



Increased self-reported empowerment is associated with, wealthier and better educated women, urban living women and more progressive views regarding IPV and FGM/C

### 4.4.1. Recollection and Self-Reported Impact of SOMGEP Participation

*'Schooling was very important for me because that was development for me, I am more experienced and to my family I am an educated person who has learned for them. My mother also finished high school in the fourth grade but got married and didn't have the opportunity to continue due to marriage but for me*

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areas) and attitudinal outcomes, such as empowerment. Detailed descriptions of each regression model, and full results, are provided in **Annex 10**.

*even though we are the same level I couldn't continue because of financial problems. I would love to reach university and finish.'*

**Single 18-year-old from Goldogob**

### **Those that remembered SOMGEP reported its positive impacts**

Just under 60% (n=240) of those surveyed could remember SOMGEP when asked if they recalled the programme, using its local name: "*Mashuurca Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha*". While we might expect more recall from such a large, multi-component programme, six years have passed since it ended, and many respondents were only 10-12 years old at the time of participation. Respondents were much more likely to recall specific activities – such as the provision of cooking oil or hosting of Girls' Empowerment Forums – implemented by SOMGEP. Indeed, 82.6% (n=198 of 240) of those who recalled the programme reported having received at least one tangible input. Even among respondents who did not recall the programme's name (n=168), 64.3% recalled at least one output.

Women were more likely to remember physical inputs – directly receiving soap, cooking oil, school supplies, and sanitary kits. In contrast, bursaries and cash stipends were less memorable. This might be because they were likely to be less visible to the women – in particular, cash stipends, as they were provided directly to families rather than the girls themselves. While tangible goods may be what women most associated with the programme, this somewhat distorts the nature of SOMGEP programming. Critically, SOMGEP trained teachers; sponsored girls' clubs after school; engaged with Community Education Committees to promote better school management; and promoted attitudinal change among adults regarding girls' education – all of which we would expect to be less visible to girls at the time. This might explain why recall of these aspects may be lower than expected.

Importantly, those who remembered the programme (n=240) had consistently positive views of its impact on their lives. As one example, 68.8% of women who recalled the programme felt that it had increased the amount of education they completed and just over half (51.3%) reported that they would not have been in school during the implementation period if it were not for the programme.

Beyond the direct impact on enrolment and retention, respondents also felt the programme increased their self-confidence and provided them with useful skills, as shown in **Table 2** below. Women overwhelmingly reported that SOMGEP gave them hope for a better future and 83.3% strongly agreed with the notion that they had already used or expected to use skills gained through SOMGEP in the future. 82.9% strongly agreed that SOMGEP had helped them be more confident. When we asked women to think about the aggregate impact (not reported in **Table 2**) of the programme, 50.8% felt it had a "strong positive impact", while another 46.7% felt it had "some positive impact" – just 2.5% felt the programme had not positively influenced their lives.

Table 2: Self-perceived impacts of SOMGEP, among those who recall the programme (n=240)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Agree a little	Do not agree at all
Do you agree or disagree? Participating in SOMGEP gave me useful knowledge and skills	84.6	8.3	2.5	4.6
When I finished SOMGEP I had hope for better things in my future	88.8	6.3	1.7	3.3
SOMGEP helped me be more confident in my life	82.9	7.9	.8	8.3
I have used or will use some of the skills I learned in SOMGEP in the future	83.3	10.4	1.3	5

*'Because of SOMGEP I had a quality education. They used to motivate us a lot. They helped me love my school. They used to pay my school fees and that made my life and the lives of my parents easier since we didn't have to worry about it. Without their assistance probably I would've dropped out of school. There is a big difference between those of us who got assistance from this programme and those who didn't. For example, we used to get free uniforms and they didn't. We were motivated not to drop out of school, and we were told that girls have the right to be educated and to reach milestones.'*

**Single 20-year-old from Garadag, still in education**

*'Another benefit is that while I'm here, I received the same education as students in the city. If they hadn't inspired me to pursue education, I wouldn't read or write. They even created a women's organisation to support us.'*

**Single 18-year-old from Dalmare**

Supporting the quantitative data, many in the qualitative interviews spoke positively about the various physical inputs that the programme had given them, and a number spoke about how they were motivated by female speakers at school, and were shown how to use feminine hygiene products etc. The provision of these feminine hygiene products was also cited several times by women as a factor in allowing them to stay in school when they were menstruating. A significant number highlighted how confident the programme had made them to speak in front of others, be heard and have a voice.

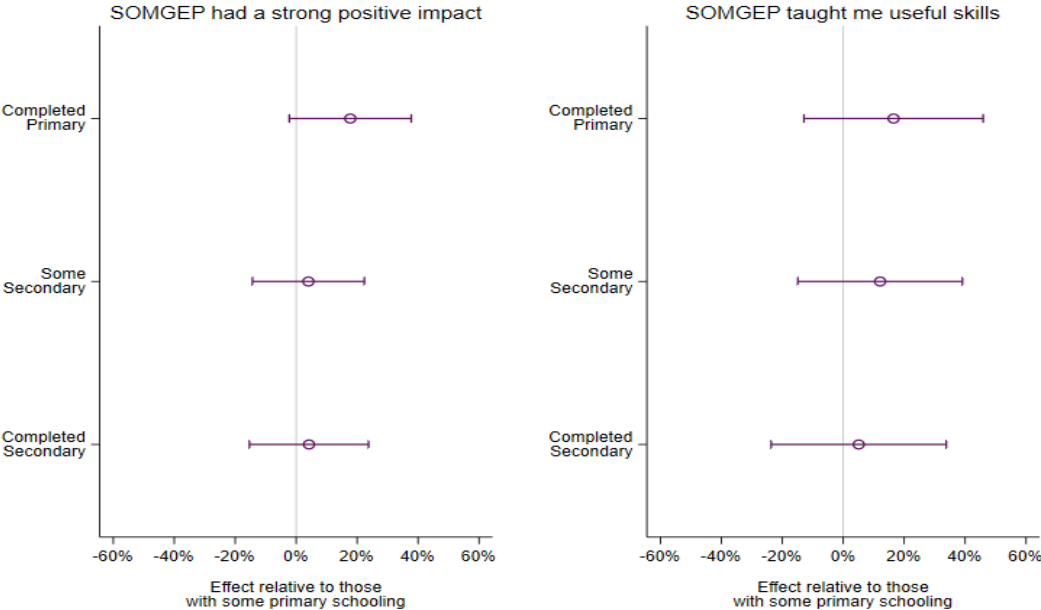
**While the majority who remembered SOMGEP reported that it gave them useful skills, those who were/are employed were somewhat less likely to view these skills as useful or to believe the programme had a strong positive impact**

Although most women who remembered SOMGEP believed it had a positive impact on their lives, those with higher educational attainment and who have been or are currently employed tend to report less positive impact. The differences in perceived benefits between more and less-educated respondents and between those who have been employed and

those who have not are substantively large, though they are not statistically significant.<sup>90</sup> While it is essential to interpret these findings very cautiously, they do suggest a pattern that is worthy of further exploration.

Educational attainment has a complicated relationship with self-perceived impacts – women who achieved higher levels of education are no more likely to believe the programme positively affected them. For instance, as we show in the left panel of **Graph 5** below, the set of women most positive about the programme’s impacts are those who completed primary school but went no further in their education. In contrast, those who either attended or completed secondary school tend to be less positive. It is important to emphasise that all subgroups of respondents hold strongly positive views of the programme; even among the most negative group – those who attended but did not complete primary schooling – 97.2% feel SOMGEP had either a strong or somewhat positive impact on their lives. This finding is replicated in the right panel, which shows the effect of education on the likelihood that a respondent feels SOMGEP taught them useful skills – again, women who completed primary school have more positive opinions of the programme, while those who completed additional schools are less likely to be positive.

Graph 5: The impact of education on perceptions of SOMGEP’s impact<sup>91</sup>



<sup>90</sup> For instance, respondents with past or current work experience score 0.19 points lower on a 4-point scale assessing the utility of the skills they learned. The result is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.13$ ), though the estimated effect is large compared to other predictors in the model. Employment is relatively rare in our sample ( $n=74$  out of 408 respondents), which contributes to the “noisy” estimates.

<sup>91</sup> Each dot represents a regression coefficient, the relationship between a given level of educational completion (listed along the left axis) and reporting that SOMGEP had a strong positive impact (left panel) or taught the respondent useful skills (right panel). The horizontal bar represents the 95% confidence interval around each

Our interpretation is that women who completed primary school attribute their continued enrolment through to the end of primary school to the programme. In other words, women who might otherwise have dropped out in grades 5 or 6 remained enrolled until an age when they otherwise would have been under pressure to take on greater domestic responsibilities in their homes or get married. For these women, remaining in school until grade 8 was perhaps less expected and they attribute their primary completion partially to the programme. The data supports this interpretation, as women who completed primary school are more likely to specifically credit the programme with increasing their schooling.<sup>92</sup>

In contrast, women who either did not complete primary, or went as far as completing secondary education, are less likely to give credit to the programme for this achievement. In the case of those completing secondary education, this is probably for two reasons: first, women in this category come from wealthier households, on average, in which they may have felt less pressure to drop out early, meaning that SOMGEP support was a less visible “force for good”<sup>93</sup>. Second, to complete secondary education, women needed to remain enrolled for multiple years after the end of SOMGEP, reducing the perceived importance of SOMGEP, as such women continued their schooling even in the absence of the programme. Both these points support understanding the evidence from a life course lens of the women concerned.

A more compelling – and concerning – issue centres on women who now live in urban areas and those who have engaged in the labour market (either currently or in the past).<sup>94</sup> As **Graph 6** shows, women in these two categories are broadly less positive about specific impacts of the programme: they are less likely to attribute increased confidence to SOMGEP, less likely to believe it increased their educational attainment, and less likely to believe it imparted useful skills.<sup>95</sup> The latter point is the most compelling, because we would expect women who have migrated to urban areas or – especially – participated in the workforce to have, on average, better information regarding the skills that are needed to successfully hold

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estimated relationship. Where a bar does not intersect the vertical line at 0, the relationship is statistically significant.

<sup>92</sup> This viewpoint is supported by the analysis, in **Section 4.2**, of SOMGEP’s impact on primary school completion rates, with SOMGEP women much more likely to complete primary school than those in a comparison group that was not exposed to SOMGEP.

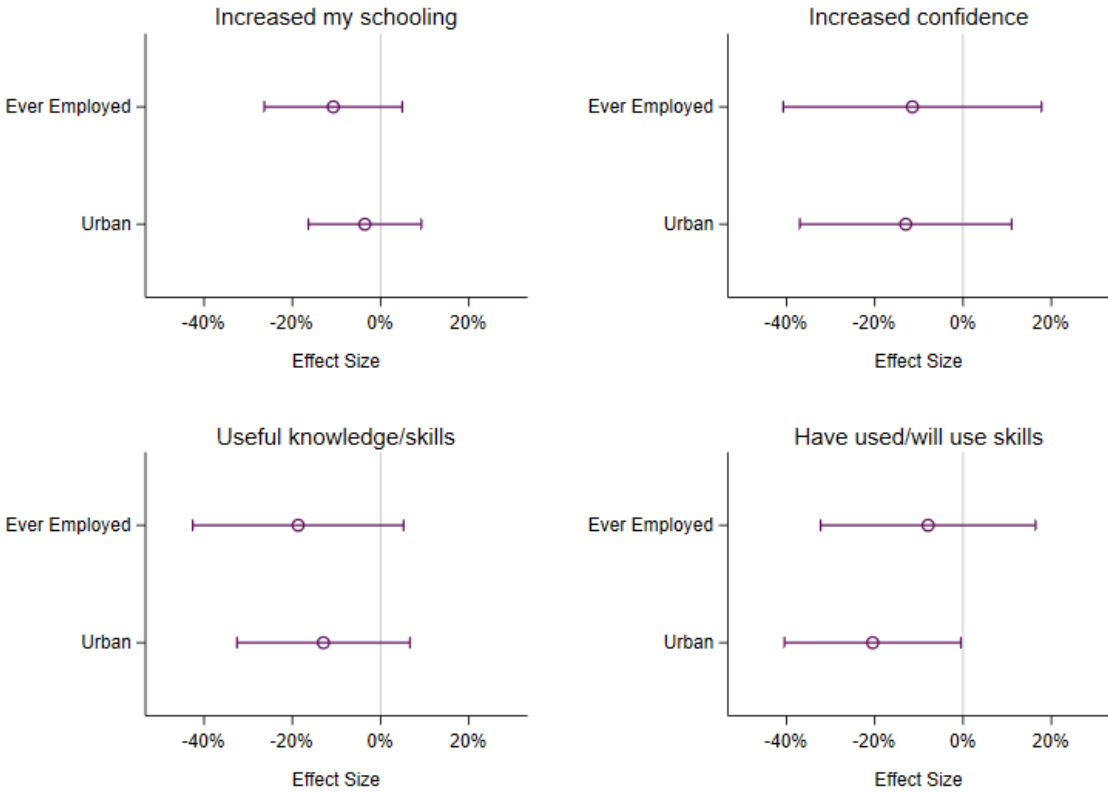
<sup>93</sup> As we show in **Section 4.3**, childhood household wealth is strongly correlated with increased educational attainment. The likelihood of completing secondary school is much higher among women who grew up in comparatively wealthier households.

<sup>94</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, women living in urban areas are no more likely to be employed than those living in smaller villages. This analysis considers both urbanity and past or present employment because we view both – living in a city or engaging in the labour market – as likely to provide information about the utility of skills.

<sup>95</sup> This is true even after – as in **Graph 6** – we control for other factors that predict positive perceptions of the programme, such as region, age, and marital status.

a job or start a business. The fact that women with employment experience are 18 percentage points less likely to believe SOMGEP provided them with useful skills suggests that there may be a gap between the skills provided and those needed in the region’s current labour market.

Graph 6: Effect of employment and urbanicity on perceptions of benefits from SOMGEP<sup>96</sup>



**Divorced and widowed women reported greater value of SOMGEP in terms of increased confidence, value of skills generated, etc.**

There are few consistent patterns in *who* feels the programme has had a particularly important effect on their lives. Arguably, the most concrete finding concerns the views of women who were married but are now divorced or widowed. Among this subset of respondents, views of SOMGEP and its impacts are much more positive. For instance, divorced women are 5.6 percentage points more likely to believe SOMGEP had a “strong

<sup>96</sup> Each panel reports results from a regression analysing the relationship between employment experience and urbanicity – among other variables – and a variety of self-perceived impacts of SOMGEP. Each panel analyses a different form of impact. Purple hollow dots represent the estimated relationship between the independent variable and the outcome/impact; horizontal bars are the 95% confidence interval around each relationship. Where the horizontal bar does not intersect with the vertical line at 0, the relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level.

positive effect” on their lives than single women, and 7.8 percentage points more likely than married women. This relationship between self-reported impact and being divorced or widowed is consistent across each category of impact: the impartation of useful skills, greater confidence, greater educational attainment, and greater hope for their future, though none of these results are statistically significant on their own. In each case, widowed and divorced women – as a category – are more likely to believe SOMGEP had a positive effect than either married or single women, all else being equal.

Unfortunately, these results remain tentative, due to the small number of divorced and widowed women in our sample (just 18 of the 240 who could recall the programme are divorced or widowed). As a product of this small sample, none of the results reported in this section are statistically significant, as they are estimated with significant uncertainty due to the small sample.<sup>97</sup> Rather, we base our conclusion on the fact that there is a consistent pattern across several outcomes: in each case, divorced/widowed women express more positive views of the programme and the differences estimated between them and single or married women are substantively large.

One way of interpreting this pattern is to focus on how women’s life circumstances and/ or stage in life might affect how they retrospectively view the programme (a life course lens). We do not believe that the programme had outsized effects for girls who would later divorce or be widowed. While this is certainly possible, if divorce or widowhood today is correlated with important early-life characteristics, it is an indirect explanation for our findings. Our interpretation, instead, is that – regardless of how they felt about the programme previously, or how they would have felt about it if they were still married – divorced/ widowed women now feel more strongly about the programme’s benefits because they need the skills they gained through the programme and schooling, such as functional literacy, financial literacy, and greater self-confidence.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The results are also sensitive to modelling choices, a common feature of regression models that focus on explanatory variables that apply to a very narrow subset of the sample. For instance, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of marriage, divorce/ widowhood, and motherhood, because these outcomes are highly correlated (no single women in our sample are mothers and the vast majority of married or formerly married women are also mothers). Our best judgement is that divorced and widowed women are more likely to report positive programme impact, while motherhood reduces that likelihood dramatically, but these results exist “on a knife edge” and should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>98</sup> To be clear, our data does not allow us to determine *why* divorced and widowed women have more positive views of SOMGEP’s impact. Of the two possible explanations outlined, we feel it is unlikely that divorced and widowed women gained more useful skills, greater confidence, etc. because of the programme. It is not clear why women in this group would reap uniquely strong benefits, outside of their current marital status. It is more plausible that women are interpreting SOMGEP’s impact through a lens of their current circumstances and current needs, with divorced/ widowed women interpreting SOMGEP benefits more generously as a result.

#### 4.4.2. Impacts among Marginalised Households

SOMGEP was targeted at broadly marginalised communities, particularly remote, rural communities with high rates of reliance on agriculture and pastoralism. The programme's evaluations also spent considerable time analysing differences in impact as a function of household-level poverty and marginalisation. In this section, we take advantage of the time that has passed since the programme ended and assess whether women who grew up in more marginalised households, within our cohort, have more or less positive views of the programme's impact. We measured economic marginalisation on a 13-point scale, with higher scores indicating households that are more marginalised.<sup>99</sup> The average household has a score of 6.4. We do not categorise households into 'marginalised' or 'not marginalised'; instead, we study how differences in household marginalisation scores, on this continuous scale, relate to perceptions of programme impact.

To determine whether SOMGEP had greater benefits for marginalised households, we use three measures of impact, all of which were self-reported by respondents in the latest round of data collection: whether the programme increased educational attainment, provided them with useful skills, or had a positive overall impact on their life.<sup>100</sup> For each outcome, we tested the relationship between household marginalisation and a more positive view of the programme, controlling for the woman's age and her region of origin, as both factors are correlated with perceptions of the programme.

#### **Strongest overall self-reported SOMGEP impacts among women from marginalised households**

**Table 3** reports the effect of increasing household marginalisation by one point (out of 13 possible) on the likelihood of a respondent reporting a positive effect of the programme. Although not statistically significant across all five outcomes presented, women from poorer households were more likely to report that SOMGEP had a positive impact on their lives.

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<sup>99</sup> Our scale of household marginalisation is a combination of the (reversed) household wealth and shorter-term poverty indices we use in [Section 4.2](#). A full accounting of the scale is available in [Annex 5](#). Briefly, it captures home quality (number of rooms, roof material, etc.); ownership of minor assets (radio, bed); household experiences of deprivation in 2015/16 (lack of clean water or cash income); and indicators for households in which adult members do not have a specific occupation or are engaged in pastoralism.

<sup>100</sup> The programme increased educational attainment if the woman replied positively to the question "In your opinion, did the program help you complete more schooling than you would have without it?" It provided the respondent with useful skills if she strongly agreed with the statement "Participating in SOMGEP gave me useful knowledge and skills." And it had a positive impact on her life if she reported that, overall, her "experience in SOMGEP" had a "strong positive impact" on her life.



Again, this highlights the importance of knowing what conditions a woman is facing, to understand the responses she may give on programme impact.

Table 3: Impact of increasing household marginalisation on related outcome

Outcome	Effect of Increasing Household Marginalisation on Outcome	95% Confidence Interval (p-value)
Increased educational attainment	+1.1	-1.4 to 3.7 (p = 0.38)
Provided me with useful skills	+1.5	-0.5 to 3.4 (p = 0.14)
Have used or will use skills learned through SOMGEP	+1.5	-0.5 to 3.5 (p = 0.14)
Increased my confidence	+1.6	-0.5 to 3.7 (p = 0.13)
Had a strong positive impact on my life	+1.2	-1.4 to 3.9 (p = 0.36)

Consider a typical woman from a relatively well-off household, with a marginalisation score around the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile (4): 75.2% of such women will report that SOMGEP provided them useful skills. An otherwise identical woman in a slightly more marginalised household (score = 5) has a 76.7% chance, while increasing marginalisation to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile (score = 8) would increase her likelihood of reporting SOMGEP provided her useful skills to 81.1%. Similarly, the likelihood that a woman will report a strong positive impact of SOMGEP on her life increases from 43.2% to 48.2% with an increase in marginalisation scores from 4 to 8.

Some caution in the interpretation of these results is warranted, for two reasons. First, there are many ways to conceptualise and measure household economic status, and different measures may produce varying or less consistent results. Second, none of the findings are, in isolation, statistically significant, though self-reporting of increased confidence and the provision of useful skills both approach the marginal thresholds for statistical significance. At the same time, the fact that household marginalisation is associated with increased impact across multiple disparate outcomes (e.g., increased confidence, increased education, etc.) gives us greater confidence in the overall conclusion that SOMGEP was particularly valued by marginalised women.

**Box 6** documents perceptions of education’s impact among those that could not remember SOMGEP.

## Box 6: Self-perceived impacts of education on life outcomes

Among women who did not recall SOMGEP by name, views of education and its importance are almost uniformly positive. Indeed, these women were even more positive about education's impact: for instance, 97.6% of women strongly agreed that education increased their confidence and 94.6% felt schooling had given them useful knowledge and skills. Perceived impacts of SOMGEP and education do differ in small ways, though: while those with employment experience were somewhat less likely than their peers to believe SOMGEP had provided useful skills, this does not apply to education more generally – experience in the labour market does not have a negative effect on how useful women find education. In addition, while women from marginalised households tended to view SOMGEP more positively, this is not true for education more generally – views of education were uniformly positive with no difference among the marginalised.

**Box 7** provides an overview of evidence from the qualitative evidence of participant perceptions of SOMGEP.

## Box 7: Perceptions of SOMGEP – Qualitative Findings

On the impact of participation in SOMGEP, most spoke about it in terms of giving them the ability to read and write, to stay in school longer than they may have done otherwise, and often recalled the physical things the school had given them e.g., oil, soap, feminine hygiene products and cash to support them to stay in school. Literacy, numeracy, and confidence were all key impact factors repeated through the interviews. Yet the impact of SOMGEP was often spoken of against a backdrop of both the desire to have a secure family life and of the last generation or so of their family's lives: conflict, migration, IDP camps, remittances, and supportive role modelling from their mothers.

### **Literacy, Numeracy & Jobs**

Being able to confidently read, write and be numerate also had a positive impact on how the participants viewed themselves and their status. Literacy was a key cited impact: *'They taught us to read and write. School changed my life because I could now read and write, as well as I can calculate maths, though I forgot because I was away from school for a while.'*

Although many spoke of the physical things they received from the programme, a number also reflected on how they were able to stay in school due to SOMGEP, and the impacts of staying on longer themselves: *'my cousin joined this programme but she left before finishing it. Now she can only record voice messages, but she can't read or write whereas I can read and write.'*

And others spoke of how SOMGEP had given them some skills to support business endeavours, despite only a few being employed or in business: *'I received help from SOMGEP to continue writing and learning. One of the biggest advantages the SOMGEP has given me is my ability to compute and comprehend business.'*

A small number we spoke to in detail were in further education, one undertaking a midwifery course. What was perhaps more striking about these women was their wider enabling environment. They clearly came from wealthier homes and had supportive families that allowed their agency and expressions of empowerment to flourish more than others.

Whilst many of our participants shared how happy they were to have been educated, wanted to continue education and voiced commitment to ensure their children were educated, only a small number were currently employed or in further education today. As described elsewhere, we cannot read too much into this at this stage in their lives and it could simply be a function of the fact that many were still young.

### **Confidence**

*'They gave me a good quality of education that allowed me to sit in front of you and talk freely and openly.... I am grateful because I increased my knowledge to the level that I am at today. It increased my self-confidence. Before, I didn't know how to write my name, but now I've reached a milestone. It has had a big and positive effect on my life. Before, I was a shy person who didn't socialise, but now I can go out to a community of people, socialise, and share my ideas. I am well educated both religiously and in terms of other knowledge. Now, I believe I can do a lot, and I am of use to my mother and country. They taught us how to generate an income and manage and improve our life. I know how to do so because of the programme.'*

**Burco, 22-year-old married, mother of one**

Many spoke about how schooling had given them the confidence to speak to and in front of others and cited this as a factor in how they felt today. Several participants did acknowledge that they felt more confident and able to voice their views as a result. For example, *'it boosted my self-confidence because I would've been a shy person if I wasn't in this programme.'*

SOMGEP supported girls' clubs and mentoring, which several of the women today spoke about positively: *'That agency hired a female teacher to mentor us and give us advice on our health and education; she also taught us how to be more confident.'* Some also described a link between SOMGEP and feeling stronger and more aware of their rights. For example:

*'We were helped by the SOMGEP which was about raising awareness about female genital mutilation. There is a significant difference; we have been taught not to abuse or harass children and women, while men have not been taught any of these things.'*

**Divorced, Single Mother from Burco**

### **Hope for the future**

All women framed their hopes for the future around their own aspirations and those for their children. Education and family were core themes. Family was central to how all the women spoke of their futures. All wanted supportive husbands and many children, who were repeatedly cited as critical for future sustainability. Often women wanted many children to ensure they had someone to support them in later life. Having a family and the norms of family life were indelibly linked to the belief that these things were Islamic.

A number spoke of wanting to enter further education or vocational training and making a (financial) contribution to their household but projected this into the future, with few having the financial resources to do so. Those that had continued with study often shared their intention to marry later. Those already married and with children felt their priorities were now focused on raising their children and being a good wife. Whilst they shared the ambition of going back into education, they felt they did not have the time now to do so.

## 5. Conclusions

*This section offers summary conclusions, potential further research areas and some possible implications based on the research undertaken.*

### 5.1. Summary Conclusions

The findings of this research demonstrate a clear correlation between participation in SOMGEP and positive outcomes for women today. We have seen how participation is associated with more years of completed primary and secondary education for these women, a greater likelihood of employment and decreased tolerance of IPV. The evidence has highlighted the importance SOMGEP women place on the education they received and speak of the confidence it has given. The data has also pointed to the clear correlations, not unexpected, between household wealth as an early predictor of later life outcomes, in line with wider literature. However, the evidence also shows how all outcomes are not equal and progressive attitudes, actions, or beliefs in certain spheres of SOMGEP women's lives do not necessarily flow through to others. There are caveats to our findings which are not unexpected, given the lack of a counterfactual, the assumptions we have had to make in developing comparison groups, and the quality of earlier data.

Contextual factors, outside of the scope of the GEC or SOMGEP, have played a key role in catalysing or limiting, or rather moderating all these outcomes today. Women's views on the role of a wife and mother within the family, for example, are unsurprisingly heavily influenced by perceived social and religious norms. Critical life and bodily autonomy decisions ultimately rest with their husbands. Structural factors like contemporary law and policy today entrench these conservative views – thereby limiting the spaces, self-determined or otherwise, that women can operate within. Older structural factors, that a generation ago saw the delivery of mass literacy programmes and the beginnings of greater equality in law for women (that were later repealed), perhaps influenced a slow shifting in the roles of women that we see in society today.

The study shows significant promise for the short (and perhaps longer) term impacts of participating on programmes like SOMGEP, and the value of UK HMG's investment in girls' education. Time will tell if these early investments turn into those hoped-for longer-term outcomes projected by the wider education literature. Further, and later, research will be needed to understand if this is the case.

## 5.2. Potential Further Research

Possible areas of further research prompted by this study include:

- 1. On-going longitudinal mixed methods research, across contexts** - this research has demonstrated the value of taking a longitudinal lens to measuring and capturing the impact of education on life outcomes for women, even in the most complex of contexts. The continuation of this research through regular 'check-ins' with SOMGEP participants would enable a richer and more complex picture of how education continues (or not) to benefit and influence participants' lives – undertaking this across different contexts would also be of significant value.
- 2. Intergenerational change and influence on educational attainment and wider outcome** – we have seen changing attitudes and behaviours across generations, and the relative self-reported importance of participation in education programmes on women today. More research is perhaps needed to understand the wider intergenerational enabling environment for girls in education, how this can be catalysed to support them, and what 'impact' looks like at the point in their lives when research is undertaken.
- 3. The impact of parallel education systems** – as has been shown, the parallel Madrassa system has interplayed with the secular education system. Researching this interplay and its impact in other contexts would be valuable. For example, exploring how and in what ways do these different systems potentially contrast and contradict each other. A better understanding of how they can be mutually supportive of girls' education would be beneficial.
- 4. Systematic reviews** – contrasting data on perceptions, described above, perhaps points to a need to reflect on what we are measuring, how we are measuring it, and if these proxies are appropriate and accurate. A systematic review of wider activities supporting education, such as work with parents/ care givers, would also be of value, to understand the relative importance of these additional activities across contexts.

## 5.3. Final Reflections

These conclusions though, perhaps challenge and prompt some reflections for those designing or implementing education programmes in complex environments, and those researching, evaluating, or using evidence to adapt them. Using the evidence gathered as part of this research as a starting point, together with some of our own team's experience, we provide some reflections below. It should be noted that rather than provide answers, we sometimes pose a question that needs to be reflected on and answered by stakeholders themselves.

## **FOR EDUCATORS**

### **The pathways from skills learnt through education and their application for future employment or business opportunities need to be further tailored and targeted, and/or made more explicit to the girls being educated**

While many SOMGEP women are still young, only a small number are currently in employment or further education. Time will tell if our already married participants go on into employment, own a future business or engage in further training. The evidence suggests that education alone, without clear pathways into income generating opportunities, leaves girls and young women unclear over the benefits of their schooling, particularly those that are within the labour market today. It is critical that the delivery of literacy and numeracy comes with a further vocational set of skills training (as has been seen in SOMGEP-Transition, the follow-on programme to SOMGEP). Girls need to leave school with a clear vision of what their new educational levels can offer them and see the possible pathways in front of them.

### **Attitudes and beliefs regarding education, such as parental support for education and girls' belief in the value of education, may play a less important role in overall educational attainment than many programme staff and researchers assume**

In our analysis, early attitudes toward education – in the case of either girls or their parents – have almost no relationship to long-run educational attainment. Broader social and structural barriers to education, especially household economic status, and pressure to marry have stronger, more direct effects.

Strikingly, in parallel to this quantitative analysis, the qualitative interviews expressed that women repeatedly cited the importance of their parents in helping them achieve their goals, education or otherwise, and what role models, in particular their mothers, they were.

The lack of, or seeming contrasting, evidence does not necessarily mean that the early attitudinal campaigns were ineffective, but it does suggest that further research is needed. There could be several reasons for this, for example: (i) there may be no link; (ii) there may have been parental respondent bias in the earlier evaluations; or indeed (iii) there could be issues with proxies or measurements used in the earlier or later rounds of data collection.

The prominent effect of household economic status also underscores the importance of financial support: even when parents support girls' education, financial limitations can reduce girls' schooling.

### **Other null results also challenge conventional wisdom regarding the correlates of educational attainment and highlight the need for further research**

Several factors that we would intuitively and logically expect to be linked to greater overall educational attainment do not appear to have this effect in the long run. For instance, physical distance to the local school is widely viewed as an important access-oriented barrier to school attendance and enrolment; however, it has no effect on long-run educational

attainment among our sample, even in a context of insecurity where we would expect distance to matter even more. Other surprising findings also highlight the need for additional research on the correlates of education and further justification of educational programmes' ToC. For instance, in our sample, there is no relationship between poor teaching quality – the use of corporal punishment and high rates of teacher absenteeism – and reduced educational attainment. And, as noted above, a girl's enthusiasm for education and self-reported influence over educational decisions are also uncorrelated with completed education. Our design is imperfectly suited to address some of these research questions, but null findings still suggest the need for more targeted research, to validate assumptions that are common in educational programming.

### **Future girls' education programmes could build on the SOMGEP model of extra-curricular classes using older community women as role models and support further community dialogues with men**

Although the quantitative data collected in the earlier evaluations highlighted no link to educational attainment today (as highlighted above), our qualitative data highlighted the importance of parental support, both mothers and fathers, in ensuring girls go to and stay in school and feel empowered to continue into further education. This data also revealed the close bond many of our participants experienced with their mothers, the respect they had for them and their contributions to the household, and at times mothers being in control of their movements (e.g., to work/ travel outside of the home). The use of girls' clubs and other support (such as training on the use of feminine hygiene products, and the provision of these items themselves) appeared particularly powerful in the SOMGEP model. However, some felt that although useful, beyond basic numeracy and literacy, they could not always see the practical life relevance of their education.

Building on the above finding, classes that demonstrate practically how numeracy and literacy skills might be used in the future could develop a life application dimension that bridges this gap. This could be supported and delivered by community-based female role models (mothers, grandmothers, aunts) who have gone on to develop their skills in a way that has led to greater independence and autonomy.

On-going engagement with fathers and men more widely through community dialogues may also be beneficial in two ways. The link between a father's education and his daughter's educational attainment suggests that pro-education attitudes among fathers may be particularly important. If fathers' attitudes can be improved through programmatic interventions, this may have greater effects on girls' education than interventions targeted to women's or mothers' attitudes. Beyond educational attainment, the qualitative and quantitative data also showed that husbands ultimately made key household and bodily autonomy decisions. If on the one hand, programmes are supporting girls to be more empowered as women, and hopefully providing role modelling support highlighted above, on the other hand, on-going and continued work needs to be undertaken with the men within these communities to continue to support social norms changes.

### **If shocks occur (such as droughts), differentiated household level support is needed to ensure school attendance smoothing, and maintain the longer-term legacies of continued education for young women**

The quantitative evidence clearly pointed that those who had dropped out and/or were old for their school year would go on to complete less education in total, which in turn has been shown to have a knock-on influence on other life outcomes. In parallel, the qualitative evidence highlighted the importance of SOMGEP support in keeping girls in school. Education programmes operating in even the most extreme environments where everyone is in need, should provide support-specific packages that track and tackle school dropouts because of unexpected shocks. SOMGEP did provide some differentiated support (such as cash transfers for the poorest households) but moving forward could explore what more could be done in real-time, as drought or other shocks occur, and some girls are pulled from schools as a response; and equally, how this could be managed to ensure that the possibility of receiving additional support is not a perverse incentive to remove girls from school.

### **Careful reflection is needed on whether and how to engage with religious schools when designing and delivering secular education programmes**

The influence of religious Madrassa schools on these women's lives was clear. More careful research into the nature of instruction in Madrassas would be useful to understand its impacts. This would enable a clearer picture to emerge around if and where opportunities may exist to 'reform' the gendered messaging conveyed within them, reduce the possibilities of backlash to secular education or indeed counter these through empowerment curriculums in school. Ways could also be identified to work in parallel with Madrassas to ensure they support the secular education of the community.

### **Given the impact of technology on women's lives today, exploring the capacity for using technology as a communication and education tool in future programmes may be pragmatic**

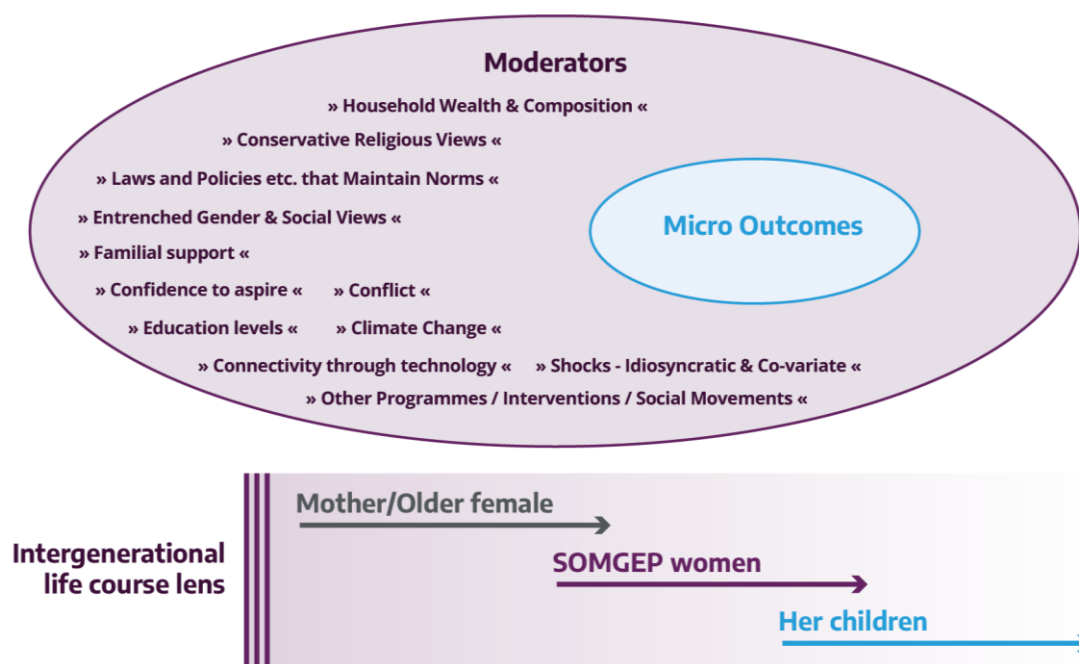
With near universal access to phones, and the importance that young women placed on them (i.e., opening up their worlds, staying connected to others, finding husbands etc), utilising them as educational platforms in the future may help to circumvent barriers to attendance, particularly as networks and internet connectivity improves.

### **Systematic analysis of potential combinations of contextual moderators over a woman's life course could strengthen both programme and research design**

Our research surfaced the need for a flexible framework to guide our understanding of how different combinations of contextual moderators influence the (micro-) outcomes or incremental change linked to SOMGEP programming on different women in different ways at different points in their lives. **Diagram 5** provides our revised conceptual framework which reflects this. See **Annex 2** for more details.



Diagram 5: Revised Conceptual Framework



No education programme or research study can expect to control for or influence all the moderators which determine the trajectories of change for individual women over their life course. However, understanding common combinations of moderators and micro-outcomes can be useful for designing and delivering activities in a way most likely to influence change.

Our findings have demonstrated that outcomes experienced by individual women are tightly bound to their stage in life – skills learnt, programme perceptions and increased confidence fluctuate based on what is happening for the SOMGEP women at that point in time. This in turn points to the need for development practitioners and M&E practitioners to reflect on taking a life course or intergenerational life course lens in their work.

### **FOR M&E / RESEARCHERS / THOSE USING EVIDENCE TO ADJUST PROGRAMMING**

#### **Evidence and ‘impact’ only make sense in context, so this requires early and on-going mapping for successful programme implementation**

There is an urgent need to deconstruct traditional ways of building and measuring outcomes that are context relevant but also realistic – acknowledging the ‘room for manoeuvre’ a girl / woman has at that point in her life and what stage of life she is in (as set out above). The reach of the immediate enabling environment for a girl must also be mapped and situated within a historical analysis of change over time when designing, delivering, and assessing education programmes. Our revised conceptual framework could offer a starting point for this mapping exercise.

**Considering some of the challenges the evidence has generated to conventional wisdom regarding educational attainment, are we tackling and tracking the right things for the right purposes?**

While there was a focus in SOMGEP (and other education programmes) on promoting girls' empowerment and changing parental attitudes to girls' education, the findings above have shown a surprisingly weak link between parental attitudes (as measured in 2015/16) and life outcomes (including educational attainment) for these women. That is not to say that undertaking work with parents and the wider community to support girls' education is not without importance. These activities should be part of the wider holistic intervention package that supports education programmes. As described above, looking back in 2022, in many of the qualitative interviews, SOMGEP women specifically cited the importance of parental support in achieving life outcomes. This raises the question whether we are measuring the right things for the right purposes?

Beyond this, a better understanding of the realistic shifts we might expect from an education programme and what constraints it is operating in is needed, when applied to programme design and delivery. For the Somali context, using our revised conceptual framework as a starting point could help to surface the otherwise invisible shifts in attitudes and behaviours that our research has found – examples of which can be found in **Annex 2**. Tracking progress against a locally developed frame seems like a more meaningful starting point than uniformly applying the usual 'traditional' frameworks that are potentially too ambitious and therefore run the risk of missing the small steps along the path to bigger change. It will also help programmes capture change in the short-term time horizon of development programming.

Taking time to understand the starting point for girls just entering an education programme (in terms of where they stand in relation to each of these dimensions) is revealed as important by this research. Drawing this kind of micro baseline insight provides a solid foundation for measuring nuanced shifts as a programme unfolds.

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