

Final reflections

Achievements and lessons learned

Somali Girls Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T)

SOMALIA

MAY 2017 – MARCH 2022



Girls'
Education
Challenge



“Since the establishment of the Girls Empowerment Forum in my school, of which I am the chair, my sisters and I have had the space and platform to discuss issues that affect us in school and in the village. I feel honoured to represent students and speak on their behalf in school and at village committee meetings. My confidence and the ability to speak in public and in front of older men in particular is encouraging to many girls. I am – and always have been – motivated to learn not only for myself but with the possibility of having a career that enables me to help my community in the future. I know things don’t come easy and you have to make sacrifices to reach your goals, and to be successful I need to try my best and aim high. I will continue working hard in my studies and hopefully secure my livelihood.”

GEF member



● Somalia

What did SOMGEP-T do?

The Somali Girls Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T), implemented in rural and remote areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug, aimed to address the barriers that Somali girls face in regularly attending school and acquiring literacy, numeracy, English and financial literacy skills. It also aimed to create the conditions for successful transition of in-school girls into new education levels and of out-of-school girls into school, alternative education or life skills training.

The project focused on marginalised girls, defined as girls who face the intersection of multiple barriers to accessing education and once enrolled, to remain in school after Grade 3. Studies conducted prior to the launch of SOMGEP-T identified that the main barriers marginalised girls face include extreme poverty, pastoralism, displacement, being over age for their grade, a high degree of exposure to violence/conflict, orphan status, disability, belonging to a minority clan and having an illiterate mother (who is often experiencing financial hardship as a female head of household).

To address these barriers, the SOMGEP-T Theory of Change (ToC) focused on four key outputs: (1) improved access to post-primary options, (2) supportive school practices and conditions for marginalised girls; (3) positive shifts on gender and social norms at community and individual girl level; and (4) enhanced Ministry of Education's (MoE) capacity to deliver quality and relevant formal and informal education.

The project used an integrated approach that included: training teachers in formal schools; providing tailored accelerated learning programmes for early primary and upper primary/lower secondary; training community committees; addressing economic barriers faced by parents and gendered barriers at the community level; and developing girls' leadership skills to boost classroom participation and shift traditional gender roles.



SOMGEP-T also worked on improving the social inclusion of ultra-marginalised groups. It implemented a range of interventions aimed at boosting the learning outcomes of marginalised girls, particularly girls with disabilities and girls from pastoralist communities. Key interventions in this area were:

1. Teachers were trained and coached on how to provide remedial support to students from pastoralist communities.
2. Girls and boys from pastoralist families were encouraged to participate in empowerment forums to enhance their confidence and address negative stereotypes associated with their way of living.
3. Community Education Committees (CECs) were supported to lead social mobilisation campaigns to encourage pastoralists/minority communities to bring their children to school and actively participate in their education.
4. Provision of alternative learning programmes and remote learning materials to enable marginalised girls to continue their education
5. The Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) resilience-building initiative supported the diversification of livelihoods for pastoralist women, particularly as they engage in VSL.
6. The project worked with teachers, women mentors and Girl's Empowerment Forum (GEF) girls to ensure that adolescent girls from pastoralist and minority communities and girls with disabilities with mental health challenges were identified and supported.
7. Disability-related activities included:
 - disability-inclusivity training for MoE officials
 - inclusion training for CECs and teachers
 - community awareness-raising
 - identification of children with disabilities
 - review and revision of school curricula to incorporate inclusive education
 - support and medical treatment for children with disabilities

Communication Education Committees (CECs) are a participatory management structure recognised by the Ministries of Education in Somalia. Formed by parents, community leaders and school staff, and in some cases with the participation of religious leaders, CECs are responsible for the day-to-day management of the school; for monitoring the quality of education and addressing issues related to teacher and student absenteeism; facilitating the enrolment of out-of-school children; and raise funds for the school.

Girl's Empowerment Forums (GEFs) are school-based groups of around 10 girls who are mentored by two women from their school or community. They are trained on a variety of topics, including leadership, child rights, psychosocial first aid and menstrual hygiene management. They also engage in a variety of activities including encouraging others to re-enrol in school, tutoring classmates and school improvement projects.

Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are self-managed groups of 15 to 25 people who meet regularly to save their money in a safe space, access small loans, and obtain emergency insurance.

“Ever since I entered this girls’ forum, my education has gotten better, because the girls in the forum help each other out in terms of studies and each one teaches the one thing they know best.”

GEF member



How did SOMGEP-T adapt during COVID-19?

The response to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 in Somalia led to a closure of schools and change in normal operations, which had an impact on project activities. The biggest challenge for the project was ensuring continuity in girls' learning, and in particular developing and strengthening remote learning so that girls with home environments less conducive to learning were not left behind. In addition, students' mental health was a concern for the project, as reported levels of anxiety and depression increased.

Some activities were temporarily paused, whilst others were adapted in response to the pandemic. With the lockdowns leading to travel restrictions, school closures and the increase of protection cases, the project had to adapt to keep in contact with beneficiaries. WhatsApp chat forums were created with GEF leaders, school supervisors, Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) facilitators and schoolteachers, CECs and VSLA women. The online forums enabled the project to continue providing support for girls to continue learning, to report and respond to safeguarding incidents, to circulate messaging on COVID-19 prevention measures, and support teachers in providing home-based and distance learning. The project continued to use these virtual platforms even after COVID-19 related lockdowns and school closures were lifted to keep in touch with GEFs, mentors, MoE supervisors, teachers and ALP facilitators, as a way of providing remote support and getting updates.

Other new activities related to COVID-19 prevention and awareness campaigns were introduced. These campaigns were collaborative, involving key stakeholders (health workers, CECs, teachers), as well VSLAs and GEF members. A survey conducted with GEFs found that 97% of GEFs received information about the COVID-19 pandemic and the basic prevention measures.

The GEF survey also indicated high levels of anxiety and depression. 44% of the assessed girls reported facing severe anxiety or depression; 55% reported that their level of anxiety had increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis; and 53% reported the same for depression. To mitigate this, the project provided female mentors and teachers with skills in identification of children with disabilities and those suffering from mental health issues, providing psychosocial first aid and follow up support, strengthening resilience, and providing support to survivors, children with disabilities and girls from marginalised communities.



What did SOMGEP-T achieve?

Improved learning among ultra-marginalised girls. The project's Endline Evaluation suggests that SOMGEP-T supported girls who were marginalised in a number of overlapping ways, such as girls from relatively poor or pastoralist households who were out of school at the baseline, girls with physical disabilities, and the lowest-performing students at baseline. For instance, girls from pastoralist households who were out of school at baseline gained an average of 10.8 percentage points in Somali literacy, over and above the comparison group. The results indicate that SOMGEP-T's design and subsequent adaptations were successful in realising the GEC's goal of making a difference for the most marginalised girls. The results also illustrate the potential of similar interventions in the Somali context, where 98% of the pastoralist girls are out of school (Somali Health and Demographic Survey, 2020).

Improved learning and life skills through Girls' Empowerment Forums. Participation in GEFs was associated with significantly higher gains in learning – a difference of 6.6 percentage points over and above the comparison group in terms of aggregated learning scores. GEF participation was also associated with a 4.4 percentage point increase in English literacy, over and above the comparison group. The results highlight how the development of girls' social-emotional skills contributes to learning processes, increasing their ability to participate actively in class, envision non-traditional gender roles for themselves, and build self-confidence and social capital. Through GEFs, marginalised girls had access to a platform for leadership skills development (voice, vision, decision-making, self-confidence and organisation) and peer support. They received mentorship and were able to design and implement girl-led activities to address key issues in their communities. As a result, they developed increased aspirations, confidence and awareness, and their actions contributed to shift community and parental perceptions towards girls' education and roles in school and society.

Improved transition. According to the project's Endline Evaluation, SOMGEP-T had a substantial impact on transition rates in SOMGEP-T communities, with higher re-enrolment of out-of-school girls, and more in-school girls remaining enrolled and advancing in grade level over time. In the aggregate, from baseline to endline, the programme was associated with a 5.1-point improvement in transition rates among in-school girls. From baseline to endline, the programme produced an 18.0-point improvement in transition rates among the cohort of out-of-school girls.

Improved attitudes towards girls' education. The Endline Evaluation shows that perceptions by caretakers of the value of a girls' education, the likelihood that she uses it, and whether her opinions are an input to the decision to re-enrol her in school have improved from baseline to endline and have improved to a greater degree in intervention communities.

Engaged communities and parents in girls' education. At endline, CECs were reportedly more engaged in communicating with parents, forming school management plans, monitoring schools, enrolling and re-enrolling girls, handling conflicts, and raising funds to cover salaries and school improvement projects when they could. For instance, the share of schools with a management plan increased from 45.9% to 64.9% in intervention schools, and CEC members complete monitoring visits with greater frequency. The presence of a critical mass of community champions for marginalised girls' rights among CEC members is a key legacy of SOMGEP-T, particularly in the Somali context, where education is largely financed and managed by communities.

“Some of the changes that we have seen of girls [in the GEF] include being able to speak publicly in front of students, and their grades have risen.”

Teacher

// STORY #1

Warda* is 15 years old and is in Grade 8, the last grade of primary school, at a primary school in Somaliland. She is one of 12 children, and one of only two who have had the opportunity to attend school and benefit from education. Her pastoralist parents live in the village with seven of her other siblings. The remaining siblings stay with relatives in different parts of the country.

Warda has always stayed with her grandmother, who relies on financial support from her uncle to provide food and other basic needs. She and her grandmother have had to move twice due to severe water shortages. Once, when Warda was in Grade 2, she and her grandmother had to move to the eastern part of their village and she missed a year of education, as the new location had no school. Later, they moved again to town, where she began attending primary school.

Warda explains, *“Growing up, my family always faced financial difficulties and I went to this public school, which is free. At times, my family tried to make me drop out of school, but through determination and perseverance I am now in Grade 8, and very soon I will be starting my secondary education.”*

Warda’s story is not uncommon in the context of Somalia and Somaliland: in Somalia, nearly 3 million people are currently classified as internally displaced, and drought is the most common reason for displacement in Somaliland.

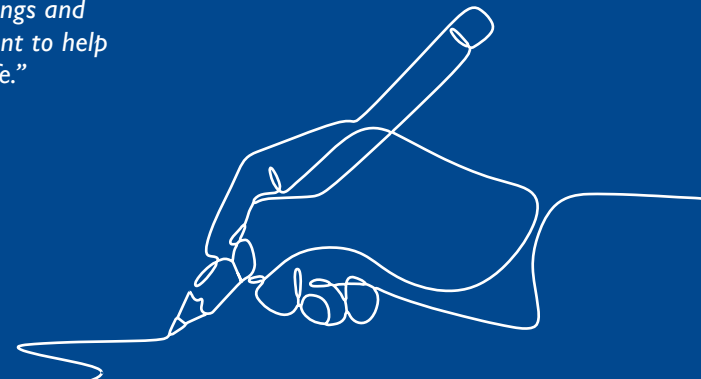
When Warda was in Grade 5, she was selected to join the school’s Girls’ Empowerment Forum (GEF). Since joining the GEF, Warda has risen through the ranks to become the Deputy Chairperson of the forum. According to Warda, GEF conducts home visits to encourage other girls to enrol in school, fundraises money for school improvement projects such as building a security wall around the school, follows up with girls who have dropped out from school, engages with female students on the topic of menstruation and resolves conflicts among students at the school. According to Warda, the GEF has also impacted relationships between teachers, students and parents. *“School*

has now become more exciting. Due to the support we have received, teaching has improved and now there is more cooperation and engagement between students, parents and teachers.”

The GEF also provides an opportunity for girls to expand their networks within their schools, building peer support networks for girls. Warda, who used to describe herself as shy, feels the GEF has had a tremendous positive effect on her confidence. As she explains, *“Being a member of the GEF has built my confidence. Now, I can attend any kind of meeting, be it with CECs, government officials, parents or teachers, and I am able to air our concerns as students. I am a poet and through the confidence I got from the GEF, some of my poems have been recorded. I am now more responsible as an individual.”*

Warda’s composition of poetry is especially notable, because Somali society has a rich oral literary tradition – with the writer Margaret Laurence describing Somalis as a “Nation of Poets” – and poets are both highly respected and predominantly male.

Warda is one of many girls whose engagement in the SOMGEP-T programme has created lasting, positive change at the individual, school and community levels. Warda’s aspirations for the future include becoming the first Somaliland female pilot. She explains, *“All pilots in the world were born after nine months just like me. I have never seen a female pilot here and I will be the first one. I want to look after my siblings and take them from the village to the city. I would also want to help members of my community who are struggling with life.”*



* Name has been changed



“There used to be chaos in the school, and the teachers would get frustrated and beat the students. Now, the school is more organised. Parents in the community are also now aware of how to discipline children. We meet every Thursday to discuss disciplining of children and to raise awareness on corporal punishment. In our community, students from our school have become very disciplined and are now role models to other children. Retention has also increased in the school, as students now enjoy coming to school where they are respected and they in turn respect their teachers and the community around them.”

Chair of a Community Education Committee

SOMGEP-T in numbers



Number of girls reached directly

32,862



Number of marginalised girls receiving bursaries

1,443



1,814
girls with disabilities reached directly



Number of teachers trained, coached and supported

595

19,428 boys reached directly

6,595 mothers receiving non-formal education training

2,356 community members participating in village saving and lending associations

71.3% marginalised girls supported with improved literacy scores

72.3% marginalised girls supported with improved numeracy scores

66.6% girls sampled who have transitioned to the next education level

To what extent SOMGEP-T deliver value for money?

SOMGEP-T had an exceptional return on investment for the most marginalised. Girls with the lowest learning scores at the baseline had disproportionately higher gains in Somali literacy scores (9.2 percentage points over and above the comparison group), as did girls who had originally scored zero at the baseline (6 percentage points over and above the comparison group).

Pastoralist girls – the most excluded subgroup among Somali children, with less than 3% Gross Enrolment Rate – had a gain of 10.8 percentage points over and above the comparison group for Somali literacy. Girls with disabilities had a 14.8 percentage points gain over and above the comparison group for Somali literacy. These results indicate that SOMGEP-T demonstrated effectiveness with equity in achieving its results.

“The quality of the education at the school has improved and it helps the girls to improve their education. My daughter used to study subjects in Somali but now she is studying in English and Arabic and her understanding has increased.”

Mother



// STORY #2

Nura* is 18 years old and lives with her mother and 10 siblings. Her mother is now the head of the household because her father is ill and being cared for by his siblings in Bader. The family's main source of livelihood is a tea shop business. Sometimes Nura helps her mother in the shop, but mostly she is responsible for looking after the house and her other siblings when her mother is working. Nura describes her family as poor and says they cannot afford to move to the city so that she and her siblings can go to formal school. Of the 10 siblings, only five are able to attend school. "My mum can't afford to send me to formal school because of the little money we get from the business we buy food and clothes. I'd like to go to formal school because it is what every girl aspires to, but these circumstances prevent us."

Hodho* is a 14-year-old girl also living in a female-headed household, as her father left when she was just two years old. Hodho has seven siblings, four sisters and three brothers. Her family are pastoralists and have a few goats as livestock, which serve as their sole source of livelihood. Given her family's financial circumstances, Hodho has never received formal schooling, despite her mother wanting her to study. Aside from what they are able to earn from the livestock, Hodho's explains, "We have no finances or business. We get what the NGOs give us as cards are distributed."

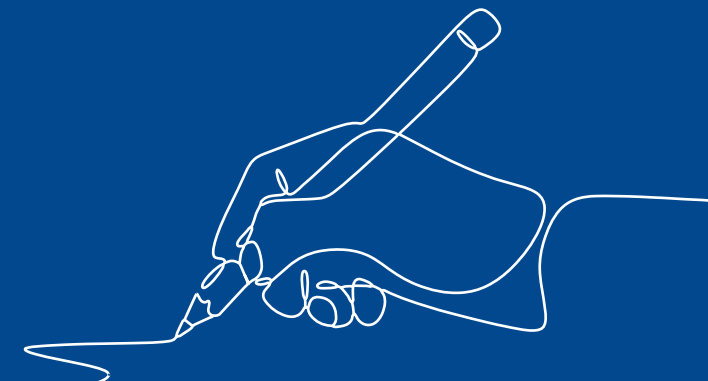
Based on their backgrounds and the difficulties they have faced accessing formal schooling, both Nura and Hodho were selected to participate in SOMGEP-T alternative learning programmes. Attending an alternative learning programme has been transformational for both. Nura is now able to read English and Somali and has discovered a passion for maths, which her teacher recently added to the curriculum. She feels she is able to apply these skills to the tea shop business and take on additional responsibilities to support her family financially. Hodho's favourite subjects are maths and Somali. She attends school every day and her mother is prioritising her education over household chores.

In addition to providing them access to critical learning, their participation has improved the self-esteem of both girls and inspired them to transition to formal schooling in the future.

"When I was uneducated, I used to feel insecure, depressed... this programme has given me confidence and boosted my ambition in life. I plan to transition into formal schooling in the future even though we do not have enough financial resources to help us with this, but I will never be discouraged. The reason is that I feel more and more interested in education and I aspire to start formal school. Even though I am an older girl, I still hope to have a chance and, in the future, I will find someone or an NGO to help us financially. I want to work in the future and help my mom and siblings." – Nura

"Now I have a good understanding. I can write well and I have become very fond of reading lately. I also feel that I can now integrate into society, such as playing with the girls we meet in the learning environment. I made friends, fortunately. My confidence has been boosted by this programme, as I hope to join formal school."

Hodho



* Name has been changed

What did SOMGEP-T learn?

Promoting positive shifts in gender and social norms. Across the life of the project, SOMGEP-T worked with religious leaders, authorities, elders, mothers, girls, boys, and both male and female role models, creating an environment where girls and boys were equally supported to attend school. Their skills were valued, there were higher expectations for their achievements, and girls and boys were safe from harmful practices. At the final evaluation, the proportion of girls who 'agreed a lot' that they received the necessary support to stay at school and learn had increased by 20 percentage points in intervention schools.

Supporting children with disabilities through a 'whole school' approach. Girls' education programmes in the Somali context should consider embedding a 'whole school' approach to the identification and support to children with disabilities, including mainstreaming knowledge and awareness about various forms of disabilities both at school and community levels, inclusive classroom practices as well as flexible health support for children with disabilities, and other forms of treatable conditions that prevent them from accessing and remaining in school.

Supporting education through Village Savings and Lending Associations: Households participating in VSLAs were able to provide school materials (shoes, uniforms, books and other needs). Monitoring results from focus group discussions confirmed that VSLA yielded positive impact in enhancing the ability of households to provide adequate materials for the girl. As a result of considerable collective effort by VSLA members, a number of children benefited from social funds, the endeavours of which included providing funds and materials for the construction of girl friendly toilets, provision of sanitary pads and school materials for less privileged school children. VSLAs were also a key enabler to girls' continued enrolment and attendance, increasing family capacity to pay fees in a sustainable manner.

Improving attendance through Community Education Committees. CECs played an integral role in providing oversight of the school management, resource mobilisation, support initiatives meant to improve student and teacher attendance, as well creating gender sensitive schools and communities. As a result of the project support, the CECs took proactive steps to monitor teacher attendance and teaching quality. School improvement planning processes improved, and evidence from the Endline Evaluation showed that CEC monitoring of teacher and student attendance were some of the key predictors of improved learning outcomes.

Supporting ultra-marginalised groups. Girls' education programmes in the Somali context should consider putting explicit focus on identifying and supporting ultra-marginalised groups through addressing barriers to educational inclusion and achievement particularly promoting a shift in social norms to support ultra-marginalised groups

Increasing women's representation. Girls' education programmes in the Somali context should consider increasing women's representation as teachers, head teachers, CEC members, and within government educational ministries.

Adopting adaptive management systems. Girls' education programmes in the Somali context should consider embedding strong adaptive management systems including learning from project feedback and contextual factors and then adopting better working strategies.

Mitigating poverty through livelihood interventions. Girls' education programmes in the Somali context should consider embedding livelihood interventions in the education programming to build the income of poor communities and working with them to invest part of the income in girls' education as part of sustainability.





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Find out more: <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/somali-girls-education-promotion-programme-somgep-t/> | www.girlseducationchallenge.org
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