CHANGE LEARNINGS

Overview
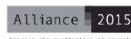
CHANGE - Improving Access to Education in Ethiopia for Most Marginalized Girls
Consortium led by People in Need

Project highlights

CAGs as a supporting project instrument played vital role in community mobilization, improved perception and sensitization towards the girls' education and protection. CAGs were invaluable in identifying highly marginalized girls, enrolment and reduction of girls' school drop-out by working with individual families. They brought girls' education into discourse within the whole community.

Combination of education and income generating activities (through SHG) proved to be suitable and sustainable model with tangible impact on the life of young women and their families. Women who engaged in SHG, making their own income and strengthen their self-confidence are the best inspiration and motivation for other girls and others in the community to support the girls' education.

The readiness to adjust to humanitarian crises and continue providing classes to girls despite Covid-19, droughts, floods or conflicts was a major factor which minimized drop-out of girls which would had been otherwise significant. That also meant to adapt overall approach from development project to the humanitarian conditions. These unplanned responses and adjustments to the crisis created the biggest challenges throughout the project duration.

Introduction

CHANGE project is part of The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) launched by the legacy Department for International Development (DFID), now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), in 2012, as a 12-year commitment to reach the most marginalised girls in the world through quality education and learning.

The PIN Consortium five years project **"CHANGE - Improving Access to Education in Ethiopia for Most Marginalized Girls"** (2018-2023) has three expected outcomes: Improved learning outcomes and life skills for highly marginalised girls; Increased transition rates for highly marginalised girls at key points in their pathway; and Improved community and government support, acceptance, and commitment to sustain girls' education. Achievement of the above three outcomes will lead to the attainment of the main objective of the project: improved life chances of out of school highly marginalised girls.

The project was implemented in the rural areas of Ethiopia in four intervention regions of the country by four partners: Amhara - South Wollo zone (Concern Worldwide), Oromia - Borena zone (Helvetas), SNNPR - Gedeo zone (People in Need) and Afar - Zone 1 and 3 (Welthungerhilfe). The project was mainly focusing on the OOS and 'never been in school' girls. The project facilitated access to education and used non-formal education approach to enrol girls in different programs based on their age category: Alternative Basic Education (ABE) programmes for girls aged 10-14 and Integrated Functional Adult Literacy (IFAL) for 15-19 years old with consequent transition into formal education or IGA.

The following sections provide overview of the learnings from the CHANGE project. It summarizes main challenges and adaptations with the learnings/recommendations for the future. The focus is on the outcomes referring to girls' enrolment and attendance, quality of education, transition to formal education or IGA, girls' protection and empowerment, as well as humanitarian events (e.g. conflict, natural disasters etc.), which unfortunately become unintended part of the project.

Challenges and adaptations

Regional differences

● In such a geographically vast and ethnically diverse country like Ethiopia (four times bigger than United Kingdom) the **differences among regions** and even within regions (zones) are inevitable. Accordingly, project focusing on education of the most marginalised girls in remote areas in four different regions would face the geographical and socio-cultural diversity. Although the activities supposed to be the same for all four regions/ partners, it became clear that a standardised approach to girls' education in all areas could not be applied. On the contrary, it was important to ensure that each region would develop their own tailored approach.

Target groups in Afar and Oromia region were mainly pastoralists (herd cattle, sheep, goat or camel). Their seasonal and cyclical migration for greener pasture as well as cultural and economic situation differentiated them from the population groups present in the other two intervention areas in SNNPR and Amhara. Moreover, while SNNPR is densely populated, Afar region has less population density.

⇒ Each partner had to develop regionally specific curricula reflecting cultural context and respecting local language.

● Moreover, **implementation was affected by external factors** (Covid-19, conflicts with displacements, natural disasters, political unrests) which have occurred in different times and different areas throughout the whole project. Therefore, the implementation process could not be synchronized, as these extraordinary events created delays in different moments for different partners. More detailed information on this can be found in the chapter below.

⇒ Partners' response differentiated according to specific locations and situations with inevitable delays of the time-plan. All disruptions that have occurred due to the emergency events required even stronger coordination among the consortium partners with subsequent modifications and project adaptations, which also required close monitoring and follow up of the security situation.

Learning:

➢ Although all partners are implementing identical activities to achieve the same objectives, due to the differences given by location, climate, accessibility, level of development, language, cultural and security context, partners have faced specific challenges and had to look for specific, context tailored solutions. Therefore, the 'one approach fits all' could not be applied in the current Ethiopian context.
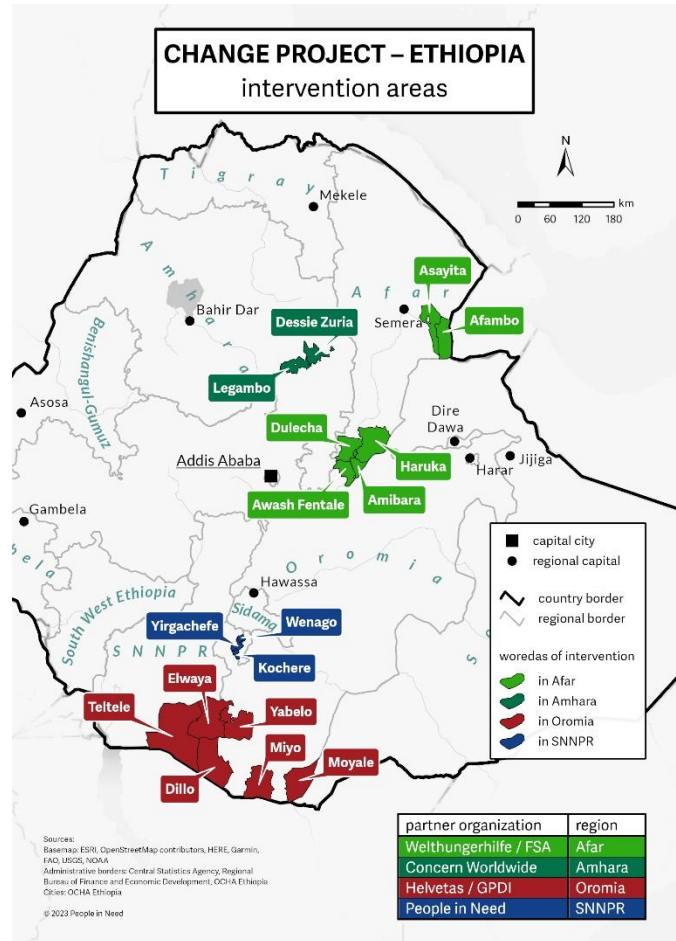
Access to education for marginalised girls

Project studies and regular close contact with communities revealed that the major problem with girls' (regular) school attendance is not lack of awareness or parents' attitude towards girls' education itself[1]. There is a common interest in education of daughters too, but school attendance is hampered by practical and socio-economic reasons, including harmful cultural and gender norms, roles and expectations. The following reasons result in girls either never enrolling in school, or they have high school absenteeism and eventually drop out of school.

Different obstacles assessed are:

- Social and cultural factors, including factors related to gender norms, roles and expectations - early child marriages with consequent pregnancies. For example, from third cohort almost one fifth of girls younger than 19 years were married. While this issue is linked to rigid and harmful social, cultural and gender norms, it is also exacerbated by general insufficient knowledge on reproductive health and family planning.

- Psychical access to education - lack of school facilities in reasonable walking distance (condition uncommon in Afar or Borena). For girls living more than 4 km away from the nearest school it is difficult and often unsafe to reach the school. This impacts their ability to regularly attend the school.

- Basic hygiene conditions – toilets and water are not available in most schools. Unsatisfactory hygiene conditions constitute a major barrier in regular school attendance. In addition, adolescent girls face several challenges relating to menstruation and its proper management. Lack of adequate sanitary products, inadequate water supply, and privacy for changing sanitary pads in schools continue to leave adolescent girls with limited options for safe and proper menstrual hygiene. Girls' inability to manage their menstrual hygiene in schools' results in school absenteeism, poor school performance, drop-out, and reduced educational attainment.

- Support with household chores[2], - due to gender norms and roles, girls have various tasks at the household and family level. Responsibilities include maize milling, fetching water from distant water points, fire-wood collection, construction of houses, food preparation, taking care of siblings, assisting at farms, milking camels, and cattle herding which all require a considerable amount of time and energy and constitute a major gender-related barrier in school attendance.

- Economic situation - families living in severe poverty are unable to afford the indirect costs of schooling. Those are not only scholastic materials, but also sanitary pads. Girls feel uncomfortable going to school during menstruation because families cannot afford to buy sanitary pads and hygiene conditions in school are also not satisfactory.

- Girls with disabilities (GwD) - GwD face barriers directly caused by their disability; girls are physically unable to go to school due to lack of assistive devices, long distances or poor infrastructure or unable to meaningfully participate on learning (hearing or visual impairment). In addition, GWD face social, emotional or physical discrimination and violence established on negative stereotypes, myths, social stigma and prejudices[3]. In order to attend school, they need to overcome social anxiety arising from previous negative experiences.

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[1] Amongst the overall 1,066 sampled girls for this study, 18.1% were married while 10.6% have experienced early marriage*./* Third Cohort Baseline Report for CHANGE, Jarco Consulting, August 2022

[2] Oromia has the highest proportion of girls (70.7%) who have never been to school. Girls in Oromia spend half to a whole day undertaking daily household chores/ Third Cohort Baseline Report for CHANGE, Jarco Consulting, August 2022.

[3] Discrimination of GwD result in specific forms of violence against GwD, such as certain types of neglect or negligent treatment; physical, mental or emotional punishment, injury or abuse; belittling; sexual violence and violation of sexual and reproductive rights; etc.

Adaptations

⇨ **Learning centers** - The partners, especially those working with pastoralist communities, had to find solution to overcome lack of school buildings in vast rural areas. The schools are present at the woreda or kabele level, but school facilities are scarce or completely absent in small remote villages. For example, in Borena, distance between communities can be several kms from each other. After discussions with community stakeholders (led by CAG) it was jointly decided the communities would create learning centers (LCs). The centers were constructed by the communities themselves from locally available materials (wood), strengthening their participation in processes and ownership.

⇨ In total, 129 new LCs and 128 gender and inclusion sensitive toilets were constructed, and 328 classrooms furnished in all project areas, which addressed a significant barrier for thousands of girls to attend school in terms of distance, safety, dignified spaces and hygiene standards.

⇨ **Shift of schooling hours** - Harvesting period always impact school attendance because many children participate in harvest works to improve the family income. It affects even girls (and boys) from regular formal schools let alone the marginalized girls. As a measure to mitigate girls' school drop-outs, without however disrupting the needed engagement in harvesting (which could cause harm to the families) the school hours were shifted to early morning, from 6am - 9.30am, so that girls could both attend school and later engage in harvest work.

⇨ **Scholastic materials** - In the course of the implementation, the project team became even more convinced about the importance of the link between availability of learning materials and regular school attendance. Lack of scholastic materials constitutes one of the barriers faced particularly by marginalized girls whose parents cannot afford to buy it due to poverty.

⇨ Improved WASH facilities together with awareness in Gender/ Girl clubs about menstruation, reproductive health and related hygiene practises contribute to better **menstrual health management (MHM)** and are breaking stigma surrounding menstruation. Girls' clubs also provide space equipped with sanitary pads, where girls can maintain their menstrual hygiene in a private, safe and dignified manner.

⇨ **Community Action Groups (CAGs)** – CAG members played a key role in supporting girls' attendance and in preventing and reducing school absenteeism. CAGs act as supporting actors in girls' enrolment in learning centers and in ensuring inclusive and safe learning environments. Also, CAGs act as key actors of positive and sustainable change at the community level, improving perception and willingness of communities to foster positive and sustainable change in social attitudes related to gender and inclusion towards girls' education through **community campaigns**. CAGs consisting of active community members equipped with trainings and experiences gained during project remain in community and thus contribute to the sustainability of project outcomes.

⇨ During observation visits in Y5 of the project, in total 4,932 cases of absent girls were reported to CAGs and CAGs were able to bring back to school 2,986 girls, which is 60.5% of all reported cases. Teacher would give every month a list of girls missing classes to the CAG. The assigned CAG members would then follow up the girls and their families to discuss with them why the girl has missed classes and how to bring the girl back to school.

⇨ Based on the endline, 83.6% (against the target of 75%) of parents were demonstrating positive attitude of CAGs' work on girls' education[4].

⇨ **Girls with Disabilities** (GwD) – 276 GwD participated in the project. Even though the number might not seem high, it should be mentioned inclusion of GwD is a complex issue requiring an expert approach (with classification of disabilities, tracking system, adjustments on school level, training of

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[4] Endline evaluation CHANGE, Development Research & Training Plc., Addis Ababa, August 2023

facilitators etc). For some girls with disability was arranged medical screening to diagnose their impairment and were provided with further services or material support accordingly.

⟹ Part of the inclusion of girls with disabilities was to increase awareness and de-stigmatization of disabilities in all society levels, from parents to government bodies. These efforts have led to an improvement in the perception of people with disabilities as by the end of the project, only 10% of household heads believed that educating children with disabilities is pointless, because they will not get any job, compared to 30% in baseline[5].

⟹ **Attendance tracker** – is a system designed to record and monitor the school attendance or absenteeism of girls introduced in 2022. The tracker significantly improved the data collection process when it replaced paper-based data collection. However, to define requirements with specifics of all partners, modify, pilot, train users and launch such tool took longer than planned. Furthermore, technical difficulties (such as internet connection) complicated routine use.

Learnings

➢ Community Action Group (composed from active community members) played vital role in mobilization, improved perception and sensitization towards the importance of girls' education and protection in community. CAGs were invaluable in identifying highly marginalized girls, enrolment and in reduction of girls' school absenteeism by working with individual families.

➢ Adequate school facilities for teaching in reasonable walking distance for girls are a prerequisite for regular school attendance. Construction of school or even simple learning center built in remote areas (with lack of school facilities) can significantly increase girls' school attendance.

➢ Access to education materials, sanitary pads, and school services were among the key services that enabled girls to access education. However, parents raised concerns about who will afford education materials and sanitary pads once the project is completed. The socio-economic dimension should be considered in future programming to enhance sustainability.

➢ To ensure that girls can manage menstruation hygienically and with dignity. Gender-specific WASH facilities along with strong awareness activities at every level limit the school absenteeism due to menstruation.

➢ Support to Girls with disabilities require more systematic approach from the project team. There were some girls with disabilities (GwD) who remained out of school. Therefore, inclusive education methods (safe school environment, training of teachers on how to support GwD) and having specific indicators on inclusion of GwD is recommended.

➢ Close relation and partnership with government bodies to have full endorsement to make any adaptation and create strong sustainability platform for the future implementation is vital component of the whole implementation (Zonal and Woreda Education Bureaus, Women and Children Affair offices, Labour and skill office and industrial parks).

➢ Attendance tracker is essential tool for monitoring school attendance from the first cohort of ABE/IFAL students. The tool needs to meet the requirements of data collection in remote areas and be user-friendly for non-technical project personnel.

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[5] Endline evaluation CHANGE, Development Research & Training Plc., Addis Ababa, August 2023

Quality of education

Better education quality has a significant contribution to alleviating problems with school attendance. Therefore, the CHANGE project also concetrated on review of curricula, improvement of qualification of facilitators and school equipment.

⇒ The **school curricula of the programs**[6] has been adapted in all four implementing regions and contextualized to the intervention zones: ABE curriculum for SNNPR (Gedeo), adaptation of IFAL curriculum in Amhara, Literacy-numeracy improvement and accelerated curriculum in Afar and contextualized curriculum in Oromia (Borena). Adaptation of the curriculum has been done in collaboration with and approved by the Zonal Education Department in each intervention area.

⇒ **Facilitators** (teachers) hired for CHANGE project were provided with comprehensive training regarding teaching informal curricula (including modern teaching methods) and received additional trainings on gender-sensitive, child-centred and inclusive education. Based on the observations, 99% of facilitators passed the project's standards of gender-sensitive, child-centred and inclusive education.

⇒ Facilitators from the community were more committed and provided better support with education and personal issues to girls than facilitators from other areas. Local facilitators were in particular beneficial during Covid-19 home-schooling arrangement or in case of community displacement.

⇒ In total **577 facilitators** against target of 545 were trained and taught in the project learning centers. Close cooperation with the Zonal education offices led to agreement that 147 facilitators will remain in the formal education system after the project's end. Thus, many more students will benefit from the improved educational quality.

⇒ It should be also emphasised that **punctual attendance and presence** of a teacher in the class is a key prerequisite for regular attendance of the marginalised girls. More than half of the girls (51.6%) agreed that facilitators were often absent for class[7]. Absence of the facilitator is demotivating factor for girls and can lead to the school drop-out.

⇒ Part of the end-line study were **literacy and numeracy tests of both ABE and IFAL students**[8]. EGRA test measuring six literacy tasks and EGMA tests (Early Grade Math Assessment) measuring six mathematical skills. EGRA tests results for ABE girls showcase that Average literacy score improved from 12.9% 29.4% from BL to EL. The same test results for IFAL girls improved from 25.2 % to 29.4%. EGMA tests increase from 42.3% to 49.5% shows the change in achievement between baseline and end-line for ABE students and for IFAL students change from 68% - 64%. Decrease of the score was caused by low value in written exercises of subtraction and addition of Level 2.

⇒ Internally developed **data management and monitoring - Unique Tool** - offers analyses of major project data and helps easily identify gaps and strength. The tool is divided into several sections based on the activity monitored (e.g., facilitator's observation, school environment, SHGs, GCs, CAGs, etc.) and it collects information through observation, asking questions, document review and photo-documentation. The up-to-date insight from field visits as well as the ability to see both the bigger picture and the smallest details have contributed to the PMs decision-making capacity and project management, including T&L quality, protection and CFRM.

⇒ The Unique Tool introduced in 2022 was not planned originally but given a great number of indicators, the project team realized that there were gaps in data collection and that not all partners used the

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[6] ABE consist of four subjects for each level (Local language, English, Mathematics and Environmental science)

[7] Endline evaluation CHANGE, Development Research & Training Plc., Addis Ababa, August 2023

[8] Endline evaluation CHANGE, Development Research & Training Plc., Addis Ababa, August 2023

same methodology for certain indicators, the consortium lead came up with this solution to ensure a regular and unified data collection from all regions.

Learnings

➢ General curricula need to be revised and modified to local context and available in local language. Moreover, field project team should be able to speak local language for effective support and monitoring.
➢ Experience has shown that facilitators from girls' community are more committed and can better contribute to supportive learning environment and protection of marginalised girls.
➢ Consortium project requires centralised user-friendly tool for data collection to keep track of indicators and project achievement with unified methodology for all. Unique Tool thanks to its design and set of data contributes to improvement of project management.

Transition process[9]

To enable ABE and IFAL girls transition into formal education was one of the objectives under this project. While ABE girls should transition into formal elementary schools, IFAL girls should join short term trainings in TVET or/ and Self Help Groups.

⇒ Regarding girls attending **ABE classes** the considerable number (till Q20 46%) of girls have had the chance to be enrolled in a formal education. However, the transition encounters various obstacles; the capacity of schools has been filled with already bursting classes (e.g. SNNPR) or there has been lack of regular schools in the girls' area (e.g. Afar, Borena).

⇒ Regular cooperation and communication with Woreda Education Bureaus and management of formal schools helped the smooth transition in most areas.

• **Low interest rate of IFAL girls to join TVET** - After completion of IFAL, most of girls were not interested to join TVET skill development sectors. Based on cumulative Q20 data, 1318 girls joined TVET and 9151 girls enrolled into SHGs. Among reasons were low wage-employment/self-employment opportunities, lack of sufficient start-up capital/tools, low salaries in employment sector and complicated access to any companies which were in distant cities. Another aspect was lack of TVET schools in extremely remote areas of Afar and Borena.

⇒ The major adaptation taken was increased support to girls in organizing more SHGs. SHGs had to overcome some challenges when they needed to obtain **legal documents** (required for SHG registration and bank account) **and with financial management**, where project team provided continuous guidance.

⇒ **Earlier establishment of the SHG** – contrary to the original plan, the SHG were established while girls were still engaged in the IFAL education. It proved to have two benefits. First, girls had more time to set up the SHG while they were still meeting during IFAL classes and second, it prevented the drop-out because girls had practical prospect to build their businesses after IFAL completion.

• **563 SHGs were established** consisting of 9 151 girls, while out of them 5,228 (74 GwD) started IGA. The examples of IG activities are keeping chickens or goats, opening of small local shop, bakery, re-sell goods (eggs, coffee, kocho), hair dressing, etc.

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[9] The data are up to Y5 (Q20) of 2023. The final project data will be available after last quarter (Q21).

⇒ **5,430 ABE girls** have been able to **transit** so far to formal education, while **1,318 IFAL girls** transited **to TVETs**, including **11 GwD**. The project girls perform well also in TVETs, as 95% of girls undergoing the CoC examinations passed the required standard.

Learnings

➢ Transition of girls from informal to formal education depends on many external factors affecting their possibilities and decision as formal schools' availability near their home, capacities for number of students in the schools, job opportunities in their residence etc.

➢ Girls after completion of IFAL education are more interested to join SHG if there is a lack of TVETs near their homes/ communities where they could continue in their education. SHG are attractive opportunity because it promises to generate their own income and enable cooperation on business plans with other women.

➢ To run functional SHG of young women, who have been illiterate before the project, is a long-term mission. Besides business trainings it requires follow up with practical mentoring and coaching of individual groups. Another improvement would be integrating topics such as financial literacy and business start-ups to future IFAL curriculums to ensure that all girls are equipped with relevant skills.

Development - Humanitarian Nexus[10]

There have been many external events which disrupted and hindered the fulfilment of project activities (especially girls' school attendance) throughout the five years project. Those events required to adapt overall approach from development project to the humanitarian conditions. These unplanned responses and adjustments to the crisis created the biggest challenges over the project implementation.

• Pandemic Covid-19 – for over a year schools in Ethiopia were closed as part of to the Covid measures. Government also didn´t allow NGOs to work in education for certain period of time.

• Conflicts and Security situation - ethnic conflict in Tigray which started in November 2020 and lasted for more than 2 years gradually affected Amhara and Afar region too. Protracted armed conflict in Southern Ethiopia (SNNPR, Oromia) mainly in various parts of Gedeo and surrounding zones caused periods with limited or no access to the project locations

• Climate change - natural disasters occurred frequently in various parts of Ethiopia during the project. To name at least the most serious emergencies:
- severe drought in Borena in 2022,
  - severe drought and consequent floods in Borena in spring 2023
  - floods in Afar in Zone 1 (Aysaita, Afambo) in Oct 2022 (the project had to repair several learning centers, damaged by the floods, relocate girls temporarily to alternative learning spaces and provide education supplies to those girls whose supplies had been damaged).

• Economic factors – over five years of the project duration the prices of almost all commodities increased significantly with impact on food insecurity of the target communities. In the past four years the value of Ethiopian Birr has dwindled by 126% against the dollar. The severe shortage of foreign currency has led to a shortage of commodities in the market. For example, price of 1l of Diesel fuel increased by

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[10] Although usually in humanitarian context we refer to The Humanitarian-Development Nexus, in case of CHANGE project it was the other way around.

133% since January 2022 till January 2023 (from 28.9 to 67.40 Birr per litter). These macroeconomic changes affect the whole society, but the most already poverty-stricken communities. As stated in the baseline survey in SNNPR and Oromia, 65.8% of household cannot meet their basic needs without charity or external help.[11]

The rate of inflation has also had a major impact on the prices of constructions, equipment and school supplies for girls. The entire procurement process for larger contracts has been complicated by volatile prices and has also affected the timely completion of planned activities.

Adaptations

⇒ **Home based learning** - during **Covid-19 pandemic**, all partners had to adjust to the new humanitarian situation to ensure continuation of the schooling. SOPs were prepared and protective equipment delivered to girls, facilitators and CAG members. Although the regular schools were closed, the CHANGE project continued its education program during the peak time of the pandemic by arranging home based learning. Facilitators were teaching in homes with small group of girls.

⇒ **Project facilitators** - It proved the great advantage to have own program facilitators. Government teachers could not teach during Covid-19, but project teaching team after agreement with Zonal Education office (in a new regime) could deliver the home-based classes and thus continue in teaching.

⇒ **Mobile schools** - partners had to adjust to occasional displacements of communities due to the conflicts or natural disasters. Therefore, mobile schools had been introduced. As the movement of communities was frequent (Afar), the facilitators (who were also from those communities) and project staff moved with the community and continued the lessons which helped to reduce the rate of girls' withdrawal from education. This kind of mobile schooling, by following the route of beneficiary girls when they moved in search of pasture and water, helped many girls to stay in education. The concept was then repeated in upcoming challenges.

⇒ **School feeding program** - in Oromia (Borena) the school feeding program was launched to prevent girls from drop-out during the drought season. IFAL girls did not want meal in the school, but preferred to take food items home so they could cook it and share it with their kids/ family.

⇒ **Project modifications** - Above mentioned crises caused delays in planned activities and required modifications not only in consortium approach in the work with girls and communities but also in administrative management of the project (reflected in the demands on human resources). Therefore, **repetitive revisions of activities and budget modifications** (including introduction of new reporting formats) had to be executed.
Consortium submitted **five major project revisions** (5 RAM) with major changes in log-frame and budget.

⇒ **Data management during emergencies** – already challenging data collection on girls' attendance and regular monitoring in remote areas were affected by events which made communities inaccessible (e.g. floods) or communities were forced to flee and became displaced in random new locations (e.g. during conflicts).

⇒ The overall **target of enrolled OOS girls was decreased** from 31 000 to 24 042 (incl. decrease of girls with disabilities from 1300 to 934) for the Consortium due to the above-described challenges in the implementing regions. Till Q20 there were 24 968 girls enrolled to the ABE or IFAL program.

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[11] Third Cohort Baseline Report for CHANGE, Jarco Consulting, August 2022

Learning

➢ The crucial learning from the emergency situations in CHANGE project is that timely and continuous follow-up was essential in the educational intervention, especially in the rural areas. The readiness to adjust and continue providing classes to girls despite Covid-19, droughts or conflicts was a major factor which minimized drop out of girls which would had been otherwise significant. The great credit goes to the consortium of partners who did not give up at the most difficult time and continued to enable education to marginalized girls.

➢ That also meant to adapt overall approach from development project to the humanitarian conditions. These unplanned responses and adjustments to the crisis created the biggest challenges throughout the project duration.

➢ In countries facing long-term instability, it is crucial to prepare flexible contingency plan and budget anticipating external events which might affect the project implementation and girl's school attendance.

Safeguarding, Protection & GESI

Ensuring safety, dignity, and protection of girls throughout the project was of paramount importance for all project partners and key requirement for all project activities. The principles of Do No Harm (DNH), safety, dignity, meaningful access, participation and accountability were at the heart of the intervention and consortium partners placed significant focus and efforts in integrating safeguarding, protection and gender and inclusion elements and considerations throughout PCM and into all the implemented activities.

Challenges and adaptations

• **Understanding the safeguarding and protection policies and cascade the knowledge into the beneficiaries and communities** – the safeguarding and protection agenda was relatively new for the local team and target communities. Consortium had to ensure that all stakeholders received regular trainings, ToTs and refreshers, especially considering that the work was done closely with extremely vulnerable and marginalized communities and population groups, and, in particular, with vulnerable children and girls.

⇒ **Consortium partners** ensured that elements related to Safeguarding, Protection and GESI were integrated in all stages of PCM and operationalised through several tools developed by the Consortium (such as Quality standards checklists for Protection and GESI Mainstreaming), as well as guidance and tools from the Global Protection Cluster (e.g. Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit and Training Package, including Sector guidance). Moreover, the Consortium engaged dedicated Technical Advisors for Protection, GESI and Safeguarding.

⇒ **Facilitators**, who are the frontline change agents in girls' education and ensure general quality of T&L, were trained in Gender-sensitive, child-centered and inclusive education methodologies. Based on the observations in Y5, 99% of facilitators passed the project's standards of gender-sensitive, child-centred and inclusive education (fulfilling on average 12.1 out of 13 measured standards).

⇒ **Community mechanism** - Besides regular trainings, communication materials and awareness by project team there were also community actors who significantly contributed to promoting protection, safeguarding, gender norms and inclusion. Local structures like CAGs, Gender Groups or

school facilitators helped communities to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills for healthy and safe relationships and positive attitudes towards gender equality.

⇒ **Gender/Girls Clubs** - were identified as a meaningful, accessible, relevant, safe space to raise up and support girl leaders who could be agents of positive social change in the future. In the safe environment girls (and boys) could raise up topics related to gender norms, their safety, family issues, early marriage, MHM, reproductive health etc. Through peer to peer sharing and discussion in this safe environment, the girls gained new impulses which contributed to the overall discourse in society.

- **Establishment of effective systems for reporting and case handling mechanism -** channels such as in person reporting, suggestion boxes, hotlines and SMS were introduced and being used for community reporting. To ensure easy and safe access and use of its accountability mechanisms, the project team conducted assessments on their accessibility, understanding and use, to ensure that all girls could safely and easily access them.

⇒ Based on the monitoring visits 93% of ABE or IFAL centers from 211 observed has established mechanisms for reporting violations of the facilitators. Four measures were monitored in learning centers including Code of Conduct in place, safeguarding materials, CFRM poster and CFRM box. This result showcase that project teams ensured that all learning centers fulfil required standards.

⇒ In the traditional rural setting of the marginalised girls, it is not surprising the girls prefer to turn for help with personal issues to community member. As mentioned in GESI assessments, most girls prefer to use in-person reporting to report any case.[12] The girls tend to turn to CAG members or facilitators in case they faced exposure to specific risk, or they discuss personal issues within the safe space of the Gender Clubs. For example, in the whole Y5 observed CAGs received 87 cases out of which 59 were resolved. CGs received 65 protection cases in Y5 out of which 31 (48%) were solved. Though it does not provide the whole picture, it showcases the key role and trust that the strengthen local structures (like CAGs, facilitators or GC) represent in the community.

- **Challenges due to the accessibility** - The escalation of conflicts and natural disasters in some of the selected project locations created significant challenges and affected the accessibility of such areas. This impacted the ability to conduct regular field visits during the extreme events. However, the Consortium ensured regular coordination with local partners and CAGs in these locations, to give continuity and adapt project activities to respond to the emerging needs and to ensure that the needed support was provided to those affected by these events.

Learnings

➢ The introduction or strengthening of the safeguarding, protection and GESI awareness in the community was inseparable part of the activities aimed primarily on girls´ education. It contributed to the increased confidence and overall empowerment of the girls as it helped them to realize their rights and potential.

➢ Besides project team, the safeguarding, protection and GESI agenda was also communicated through community platforms such as CAGs or GC accompanied by CFRM and locally appropriate visual materials (translating into local languages, pictures instead of written instructions etc.)

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[12] GESI SENSITIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT, Gedeo Zone - SNNPR, People in Need, February 2023
GESI Assessment Report, Afar, WHH, July 2023

Girls' empowerment

CHANGE project contributed to the empowerment of girls and women by promoting equal access to education, increased economic opportunities, emphasizing dignity and safety and create opportunities for more equitable participation in society for females. Various platforms were introduced to support social and economic empowerment of girls – CAGs, GC, SHG, Facilitators. Promote girls' empowerment help them realize their rights and potential, advance gender equality within society, and disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty, discrimination and deprivation.

⇒ At the beginning of the project **CAG members** were not sufficiently confident in using their full potential to influence and make decisions in the interest of the education and protection of girls in the community. As they were gaining experiences supported by the project team, CAGs became the key **active agents of positive and sustainable change,** providing community-level support and were confident in voicing girls agenda. CAGs learned to and became key agents for the mobilisation of the community in the interest of girls' education, improvement of school attendance and reduction of girls' school absenteeism and drop-outs by meeting with families, organisation of community campaigns, negotiation of construction of accessible and safe learning centers or school toilets from community resources etc. Finally, the sharing of experiences among the CAGs created stronger network for mobilizing resources.

"I came from a very poor family. My parents depended on a very small farm. I was the sixth child to my parents. They couldn't afford to send all of us to school. I was among my sibling who stayed in the house to help my family. Two years ago, Community Action Group (CAG) members from my village told me about the opportunity being available for girls like me to access basic education and business skill trainings. I grab the opportunity immediately and started my education. Throughout the two years, I have been supported education and sanitation materials. Apart from the material assistance, I have got moral support by my teachers and local CAG members that energize me to stand firmly and finish the two years IFAL program. Now I can read and write. Besides, I got basic knowledge on how to make business after attending the two weeks business skill training. I now joined saving in self-help group and planning to start my own business", Aregash Bekele, 18 years.

⇒ **Gender clubs** were peer-to peer support community-based groups for girls and boys. They created safe space to raise various topics on education, safeguarding, protection, gender equality, social inclusion, GBV, MHM etc. They were usually established in school premises where girls (and boys) had regular meetings. As part of the support, girls received not only trainings but also girls' hygiene kits including sanitary pads. Within the Girls club girls can maintain their menstrual hygiene in a private, safe and dignified manner.

⇒ The girls from community who have leadership potentials had the opportunity to remain active in their communities as well as their informal education. Engagement and inclusion of boys too was important to achieve sustainable positive change in gender and societal norms and roles.

⇒ In Y5 the proportion of project girls' enrolment against non-project pupils' enrollment was on average 59%. The proportion of boys enrolled was 18% vs. 82% of girls. Moreover, the average number of project girls enrolled in a GC was 42.8 and the average number of pupils enrolled in a GC was 73.1 (average no was 59.8 girls/ 13.3 boys). The GC membership was bigger in Amhara and Gedeo and smaller in Afar and Borena.

Tesfanshe has been working at the girls' club associated with Dumerso Primary School for several months. She said that by using various opportunities and organising an awareness-raising campaign, they could change society's attitude toward gender-based violence. They are also able to help girls maintain hygiene during their menstruation cycle. "My team and I use to meet twice a week to keep each other up to date on what went on in their classes and outside of school." Tesfanshe added that: "We received pads and supplies from CHANGE Project, so the girls didn't worry about missing class. In addition to the sanitary pads, we have set up a bed for them to rest if needed during period in our center."

⇒ **Self-confidence of SHG members** - The girls who have started IGA are earning income and thus improving their economic situation with growing self-confidence. These positive examples have significant impact not only on girls but also on the attitude of community towards the girls' education. Based on data from Unique Tool, 84% of monitored SHG members (90% for members doing IGA) demonstrate self-confidence in their economic decision-making, which is a significant increase from 30% in baseline. SHGs have thus proved to be an important opportunity for both personal and economic growth of the marginalised girls.

> *"Concern Worldwide came in 2019 in our kebele to register 'out of school' girls and we became among the first group of girls who started the IFAL program. Starting school helped us to free our minds and exchange ideas with our friends. While we were studying, it helped us to increase our self-confidence, financial skill, numeracy and literacy skills."* As the group members continue talking: *"The courses, housekeeping and hygiene management, the benefits of saving, home gardening, bee keeping and poultry production are among major skill we developed."* Fana self-help group (SHG) 12 members lives in Wolete Kebele in Legambo Woreda.

⇒ **Girls with disabilities** - Actual attendance of GwD in schools, paired with the conducted sensitisation on diversity and inclusion which was part of discussions in Gender Clubs and community meetings contributed to elimination of social stigma and stereotypes associated with disability and positively changed perception and understanding of disabilities.

⇒ In most of the cases project team arranged medical examination for GwD (in Y5 it was 198 out of 218 enrolled GwD), provision of medication or assistive devices or/and medical treatment (physiotherapist, surgery)[13]. The provided medical support and treatments helped the girls to participate in and benefit from project activities, continuing their learning as well as increasing their chances in better quality of life. Actual attendance of GwD in schools, paired with the conducted sensitisation on diversity and inclusion which was part of discussions in Gender Clubs and community meetings also contributed to challenging stigma and stereotypes associated with disability and positively changing the perception and understanding of disabilities.

⇒ The success stories of GwD who, thanks to the project intervention have started to attend ABE or IFAL program and have either alleviated or completely recovered from their disability (depending on the type and degree of disability), became well known within community and thus the whole CHANGE project. It had the effect that people started to be more interested in activities of the CHANGE project in their community.

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[13] Among disabilities were Mobility and Physical Impairments, Visual or/and Hearing Impairment, Cognitive or Learning Disabilities. Many impairments were result of untreated injuries.

Toyiba Demisse from Lagombo woreda left school when her father passed away and she had to support her chronically ill mother and younger brother. Due to her missing hand, she did not have many opportunities. Later she joined CHANGE project and after completing IFAL program she took sewing course. *"I am so happy for this opportunity; going to school gives me relief. I am getting busy with the trainings and now I am less stressed. The training builds my confidence and now I believe I can do more. I would like to thank Concern for the opportunity."* Toyiba Demisse, 19 years.

Learning

➢ Girls, who through education and by securing their own income, have stepped out of the subordinate role, gained self-confidence and become more active agents of society, are the role models for other girls in communities. Although community-based structures (GAC, SHG, GC) require capacity building and long-term support they represent sustainable way to women empowerment.

➢ To be able to challenge and change harmful, deeply rooted social and gender norms and discriminations requires time and a long-term efforts and commitment. However, achievement such as learning outcomes, improvement of teaching approach, gained business skills, improved economic situation and meaningful participation in community affairs contributed to building and strengthening self-awareness and self-value and foster ability to pursue development in life.

➢ Arrangement of medical examination and consequent support with provision of medication or assistive devices or/and medical treatment for GwD often contributed to a significant improvement in the quality of life of those girls whose parents would otherwise not have had the opportunity to afford adequate care.