

CHANGE LEARNINGS

Community Action Groups (CAGs)

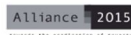


CHANGE - Improving Access to Education in Ethiopia for Most Marginalized Girls
Consortium led by People in Need

Girls'
Education
Challenge



CONCERN
worldwide



CAGs as a supporting project instrument played vital role in community mobilization, improved perception and sensitization towards the girls' education and protection. GACs ensured link between institutions and community that worked together to improve the girls' education.

CAGs were invaluable in identifying highly marginalized girls, enrolment and in reduction of girls' school drop-out by working with individual families and schools.

Introduction

Community Action Groups (CAGs) were designed as a supporting instrument in strengthening of girls' education. CAGs were set up at the community level with local members (religious leaders, women's representatives, school directors etc.). CAGs were identified as a key intervention for community resource mobilization and liaison role between government and communities as well as with the girls' families.

The goal of CAG was reinforcement of girls' enrolment in learning centers, inclusive and safe learning environment, and improved perception and willingness of communities to foster positive social attitudes towards girls' education through community campaigns. CAGs were particularly identifying girls with high risk of dropping out and providing additional support at the HH level to individual families. CAG consists of three substructures focusing on different aspects: Absenteeism & Drop-out prevention, Safeguarding/Protection and Social Inclusion. These substructures have a collection of multifaceted teams with multiple roles and responsibilities together to prevent and address girls related problems.

Challenges & Adaptations

- At the beginning of the project CAG members had difficulties to get support for the Change Project intentions in the community because of the deep-rooted social norms and perceptions like assigned roles for women, marriages at a very young age of girls, low involvement of women in community affairs etc. Besides, CAGs were not sufficiently confident in **using their full potential to influence and make decisions** in the interest of the girls' education and protection in the community.
 - ⇒ As they were gaining experiences supported also by the project team, CAGs became 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. 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**. They negotiated constructions 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.

- Girls' education topic was rarely or never raised in any type of **community meetings**.¹
 - ⇒ After the formation of the CAG, the agenda of the community conversation has included the education of girls, their protection and how to minimize the awareness gap of the community on the importance of girls' education. That brought girls' education into the discourse not only in meeting but into the whole community.
- 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.
 - 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.
- There were challenges for CAG to **coordinate the three main subcategories** under one structure. A supporting factor was integration of CAGs into the existing systems to make it institutionalized which also strengthen their sustainability.
 - ⇒ With growing experiences and active participation CAG members strengthen their ownership in the issues they were engaged in.
- **Role of community platforms in protection and safeguarding** - In the traditional rural setting of the marginalised girls, it is not surprising the girls usually prefer to turn for help to community member. As mentioned in GESI assessments, the majority of girls prefer to use in-person reporting to report any case.² 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 out of which 31 (48%) were solved. Though it does not provide the whole picture, it showcases the key role and the trust that the strengthen local structures (like CAGs, facilitators or GC) mean in the community.
- The original **target number of established CAGs** was **219**. Despite many challenges and modifications of other targets, there were **223** functioning CAGs at the end of the project.

Consortium coordinator as part of monitoring visited class in home-based learning setting during Covid-19 pandemic in village in Gedeo. Three women eagerly watched them. Those were women-mothers and importantly CAG members. One of them arranged this temporary learning space in her friend's house. They came to share experiences on how they motivate girls to keep attending classes in the home-based centers in their village: "It is important they will continue going to school even now (during Covid). If they would stop, they might never start again." They also thanked for this project which gave girls hope for education and a better life.

¹ 47% of the respondents from both regions implied that girls' education agenda are rarely or never raised in any type of community meetings. (Oromia, SNNPR)/ Baseline C3, Jarco Consulting, August 2022

² GESI SENSITIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT, Gedeo Zone, SNNPR, February 2023
GESI Assessment Report WHH July 2023

Learnings

- CAG were invaluable in identifying highly marginalized girls, had significant influence on the reduction of girls' school drop-out, and promotion the life changing impact of girls' education on life of individuals, families and whole communities
- It requires time and effort to fully develop CAG teams. Initial identification of the active members of community, training with clear-cut SOP with instructions and benefits of CAG for the community and continuous support are essential steps to build functional and successful community action group.
- CAGs contributed to strengthening of referral mechanism and its integration into the government system.
- CAGs consisting of active community members equipped with trainings and experiences gained during project can further develop the cooperation with others local stakeholders that has been built up in the course of the project. Hence, CAGs rooted within community represent a sustainable model with high community acceptance.