CHANGE LEARNINGS

GIRLS' EDUCATION

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

Ensure teaching delivered by local teacher from the community with curricula adapted for context and language. Field project team should be able to speak local language for effective support and monitoring.

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 areas with lack of school facilities can significantly increase girls' school attendance.

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

Introduction

CHANGE project was implemented in the rural areas of Ethiopia of four intervention regions: 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 target group were OOS and 'never been in school' girls. The project facilitated temporary learning spaces for girls to access their education and uses non-formal education approach to enroll 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.

Challenges and adaptations

Access to girls' education

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. 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:
- <u>Social and cultural factors, including factors related to gender norms, roles and expectations</u> - 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.
- <u>Psychical access to education</u> - 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.
- <u>Basic hygiene conditions</u> – 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.

- <u>Support with household chores</u>, - 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.
- <u>Economic situation</u> - 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.
- <u>Girls with disabilities (GwD)</u> - 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.

Adaptations

o **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.

o 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.

o **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.

o **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.

o 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.

- o **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.
- o During observation visits in Y5 of the project, in total 4,932 cases of absent girls were reported to CAGs who 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.
- o Based on the endline, 83.6% (against the target of 75%) of parents were demonstrating positive attitude of CAGs' work on girls' education[4].
- o **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 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.
- o 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.
- o **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 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.
- ➢ 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.
- ➢ 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.

- ➢ 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.

Quality of education

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

- o The **curriculum of the programs** 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.
- o Currently the informal education is designed to cover **two languages**, local language and English. It is not unusual, that script of local language is not based on Latin alphabet (like English). That implies, that girls have to start learning two very distinctive alphabets with different pronunciation at once. Curricula in three regions were modified to focus only on one local language.

- o **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.
- o 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 (till August 2023) will remain in the formal education system after the project's end. Thus, many more students will benefit from the improved qualification and competency of teachers.
- o 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 particularl beneficial during Covid-19 home-schooling arrangement or in case of community displacement.
- o 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. Absence of the facilitator is demotivating factor for girls and can lead to the school drop-out.

- o Part of the end-line study were **literacy and numeracy tests of both ABE and IFAL students**. 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% to 29.4% from BL to EL. The same test results for IFAL girls improved from 25.2 % to 29.4%.
- o 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.

Learnings

- ➤ General curricula need to be reviewed 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 for marginalised girls.

Transition process

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.

a) Regarding girls transitioning from **ABE classes to formal schools**:

- o 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).
- o Regular cooperation and communication with Woreda Education Bureaus and management of formal schools helped the smooth transition in most areas.
- o After completion of ABE 5 430 girls transitioned to the formal school.

b) Regarding girls transitioning from **IFAL classes to TVETs or SHG**:

- o **1 318 IFAL girls** joined short-term skill trainings in TVETs in garment, embroidery, food preparation provided by TVET colleges. The project girls perform well in TVETs, as 95% of girls undergoing the CoC examinations pass the required standard. However, the project could not follow up girls after completion of TVET short term training. Therefore, it is unknown, how much they used the gained skills in their self-employment if any.
- o **Transition was problematic esp. in Afar and Borena region**, where communities consist of pastoralists living in extremely remote areas with lack of TVET schools. Hence, the transition took place only in SNNPR (Gedeo) and Amhara (S. Wollo).
- o **Low interest rate of IFAL girls to join TVET** - After completion of IFAL, most of girls were not interested to join formal 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.

- o   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.
- o   **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.
- o   **563 SHGs were established** consisting 9151 girls, while out of them 5,228 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.
- o   **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.

Learnings

- ➢   Transition of girls from informal to formal education depends on many external factors affecting their possibilities and decision, namely formal schools' availability near their home, school capacities for number of students, 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. SHGs are attractive opportunity because it promises to generate girls´ 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.