



The Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T)

Blog, Learning Papers, and Impact Stories

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Girls'
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Blog - Strengthening Somali girls' leadership and resilience through Girls' Empowerment Forums

Introduction

The Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T) was established in May 2017 to promote girls' education in Somaliland, Puntland, and Galmudug. As part of this initiative, Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs) were created to increase girls' leadership skills and self-esteem by supporting girls in Grades 4 to 8 to participate in school governance and complete various trainings on leadership and financial literacy. GEFs consist of 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-enroll in school, tutoring classmates and school improvement projects. In 2018, just under one-third of girls enrolled in SOMGEP-T schools had participated in a GEF or its activities in the previous year, suggesting that several thousand girls may have participated in GEFs over the four-year project period. As SOMGEP-T comes to a close, this blog delves into how GEFs influenced girls' confidence and social capital, learning, transition, safety and mental health.

Confidence and social capital

The most direct impact of participation in a GEF was, unsurprisingly, on confidence and leadership skills. Girls' confidence and leadership skills were measured during the baseline, endline and two midline evaluations. From baseline to the first midline, there were no significant differences in confidence between those girls who did and did not participate in GEFs. However, as time went on, the girls who participated in GEFs were much more likely to report higher levels of confidence. For instance, they became much more likely to report speaking up in class and having a desire to learn. Qualitative interviews, many of which were conducted specifically with GEF participants, emphasised a change in their self-confidence over time. These changes are particularly noteworthy, given the prevailing lack of girl voices in classes before their participation in GEFs. For instance, one focus group participant described how she had become more comfortable in class, *“Before, three years ago, I felt scared to ask questions of my teacher. But now I ask them any question.”*¹

Another girl attributed her increased confidence directly to her peers in her school's GEF:

*“They helped me to not be afraid to make a presentation in front of the students, which was encouraging for me, because in the past I used to be very scared.”*²

The increase in girls' confidence leading to their more active participation in the classroom is a success in its own right, with clear implications on learning outcomes as well.

Learning and attendance

Girls in GEFs also saw significant improvements in learning outcomes (as much as 16.3 points

¹ Risk Mapping Focus Group. Puntland. 2021. #510.

² Girls Networking Focus Group. Puntland. 2021. #410.

higher than other girls) in numeracy and literacy. GEF participation seems to increase confidence generally, but the most direct benefit for learning may be girls' improved confidence in the classroom and increased willingness to ask questions and participate in class. For instance, girls who participated in GEF activities said they are more comfortable when they need to speak in front of adults and are more comfortable reading in front of others. To the extent that this facilitates active classroom participation, it should also promote learning. Although it is not a core activity of GEFs, girls often stated that their fellow GEF members actively supported their efforts to learn:

“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.”³

In addition to study sessions and confidence-building, GEFs appear to improve attendance. Girls who participated in GEF activities tended to miss fewer days of school. This is almost certainly due to the network that is built through the GEF, which provides girls with a support network and builds friendships that can encourage girls to attend school more consistently. Moreover, encouraging girls to feel a sense of responsibility to their clubmates and their school can promote attendance, as girls do not want to “let down” their peers.

Transition and school-level benefits

Much like their impact on attendance, GEFs also improved girls' transition from one grade to the next. Improvements in transition rates for girls in GEFs were seen as early as the second year of the programme where 87% of girls in GEFs transitioned compared to just 77% of non-GEF girls. In addition, GEF participation in earlier years was associated with higher enrollment rates in later years of the programme. Just as GEFs can help girls form a support network that encourages consistent attendance, GEFs can also encourage girls to continue in their education because of their support system. As shown above, GEF participation is highly correlated with increases in confidence and self-esteem, possibly making girls want to continue their education. A participant in one GEF focus group explicitly linked enrolment to the group's encouragement:

“The [GEF] has helped us in many ways, such as encouraging us not to drop out if we face a challenge.”⁴

The benefits of an active GEF are not limited to the core group of girls who participate, however. Several GEFs reported performing active outreach to a variety of girls who had dropped out of school or who were never enrolled. At least one GEF focus group stated that they were able to help another girl come back to school after she dropped out.⁵ Others reported outreach as one of their primary activities:

“We encourage girls who have dropped out to return to school. When we meet at the [GEF], we encourage them.”⁶

Community Education Committee (CEC) members often said the same thing, saying that the GEF

³ Girls Networking Focus Group. Somaliland. 2021. #405.

⁴ Girls Networking Focus Group. Somaliland. 2021. #402.

⁵ Risk Mapping Focus Group. Somaliland. 2021. #508.

⁶ Girls Networking Focus Group. Somaliland. 2021. #407.

members encouraged other students to continue in school.⁷ Other CEC members reported that the GEF in their community raises awareness of the value of education, including through assemblies or presentations at school and in the community.⁸

Efforts such as these help to explain the fact that schools with more active GEFs tend to have higher transition rates. While GEF members, themselves, are more likely to remain enrolled and move up in grade level, this also applies to other girls in their schools. Schools with more active GEFs – defined by the share of girls who had heard of recent club activities – had substantially higher enrolment rates and better transition outcomes, even among girls who were not personally involved in the GEF at all. For instance, non-GEF girls in schools with no GEF or one that is inactive had a transition rate of just 48.2%, compared to 75.5% among the same type of girls in communities with very active GEFs. While schools with active GEFs are almost certainly different in other important ways – possibly enjoying better management, more teacher engagement, and more community support – it is reasonable to attribute higher transition rates, in part, to the efforts of GEF participants to raise awareness and encourage enrolment by out-of-school girls.

Girls in GEFs were also more successful in making a transition to home-based learning when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020. Almost half of the girls in GEFs were able to spend at least two hours a day studying, while only 16% of non-GEF girls were able to spend the same amount of time studying.⁹

Mental health

Despite improvements in self-esteem, confidence and learning outcomes, GEFs did not appear to affect the reported anxiety or depression of included girls overall. This may be due to the low number of girls reporting daily or weekly anxiety or depressive symptoms which make it difficult to determine whether GEFs had an impact. Low reporting rates may also be due to the age of the girls – who are largely younger than when most anxiety or depression-related illnesses start – or cultural stigma around reporting or recognising mental health issues or illness. Despite challenges to measuring the impact of GEF on girls' mental health, evidence suggests that in significantly worsened circumstances, such as during the crux of COVID-19 pandemic, those participating in the GEFs and had lower levels of anxiety and depression than those who did not. This suggests that the GEFs impacts are more observable in acute circumstances where they might serve as a safety net and peer community for girls. This conclusion is also supported by aforementioned evidence, that GEF participating girls had higher school participation rates than those who did not.

Conclusion

Overall, the GEF is one of SOMGEP-T's most impactful interventions for improving girls' education. Girls who participated in a GEF showed increased confidence and social capital, in terms of their social network. These support networks likely played a role in their success during COVID-19 and long periods of remote learning that it brought. While the GEF did not appear to impact mental health outside of COVID-19, girls did feel empowered to stop ongoing conflicts at their schools and generally felt safe while at school. Girls in a GEF had higher learning scores and transition rates than other girls, meaning they were more likely to successfully graduate from school and pursue advanced opportunities. And GEFs had benefits for other girls in the community, promoting enrolment and transition even among girls who were not active participants. The GEF is a powerful model for empowering girls to not only stay in school but succeed there as well. Building on the above evidence on the importance of the impact of the GEFs model on girls' learning outcomes as well as over their mental health and well-being, CARE Somalia in

⁷ FGD with CEC Members. Somaliland, 2021. #106.

⁸ FGD with CEC Members, Puntland. 2021. #107.

collaboration with the various MOEs and partners is ensuring this component is mainstreamed across all new Education projects mainly those targeting girls' education. Two new projects - the Global Affairs Canada-funded GEEPS project and the Girls' Education Challenge-funded Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) project - have recently worked on revising the GEFs training guidelines and are rolling out the model leveraging the experience of the Gender Focal points across Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug and expanding its use to Banaadir, Hirshabelle, Jubaland and South West States, benefitting more girls across the country. Lessons learnt from the model are also being used by CARE's global education and adolescent empowerment portfolio, generating evidence of the positive impact of girls' leadership skills development and informing the use of the model in other fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Impact Stories

Peer To Peer Support - Impact of Girls' Empowerment Forums

Fifteen-year-old Warda¹⁰ is in Grade 8, the last grade of primary school, at Kadhar¹¹ Primary School in Somaliland. She is one of 12 children in her family and one of the 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, and 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). GEFs are a platform used by the Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T) to develop girls' life skills, including leadership competencies. GEFs are school-based empowerment clubs which give vulnerable girls from pastoralist and poor families an opportunity to participate in the governance of their schools by addressing gender barriers in education, completing training that encourages their leadership and mentorship skills and engagement in decision-making, and attending financial literacy training.

GEFs are comprised of 10 elected leaders who represent Grades 4 to 8. The forum appoints four girls to the management board, which is comprised of the chairperson, deputy chairperson, treasurer and secretary. Each girl has different roles and responsibilities. GEF members are supported by two female mentors who can be either a female teacher, a female from their local community education committee (CEC), or a female head of school. These mentors are trained on leadership and mentorship skills, child rights, menstrual hygiene management, psychosocial first aid and other topics. Together, the GEF leaders and their respective female mentors develop an annual action plan to implement activities designed and led by girls to address gender barriers in their schools and communities. A Ministry of Education gender focal point is appointed to provide further guidance and follow up on progress achieved on planned activities.

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 enroll 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

¹⁰ Name has been changed

¹¹ Name has been changed

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. In fact, the program’s impact evaluation indicated that the GEFs was one of the most impactful aspects of the programme. The results of this research suggest that participation in a GEF has dramatic positive effects not just on girls’ Youth Leadership Index scores (a measure of self-perceptions of leadership), but also on girls’ learning outcomes and attendance in school. GEF participation appears to provide girls with a stronger support network, encouraging more frequent attendance and greater participation in the classroom. Girls also receive additional help with schoolwork, either directly through the GEF or through friendships made at the GEF. These results and the accounts of girls like Warda continue to validate the assumptions underlying the life skills activities – including the establishment of GEFs – taking place under the SOMGEP-T programme.

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.”* While she pursues these dreams, Warda will continued to compose poetry, including this poem she shared on the importance of education:

The progressive and prestigious school
Is found in Somaliland
Famous across the country and its name is Khadar Primary School
Well educated teachers bestowed by God
Enlighted the whole world and took us very high.
Their reward is paradise.
A God given well dedicated mentor shows us the path.
Kindhearted, patient teachers.
The Honorable Mum/Head teacher brings out millions of teenagers through education
Fruit and sorghum a good for the body, same as knowledge is good for personal development
Knowledge is light, can take you out of darkness.
The dark side of the house is being avoided.
We Somalis why not we run away from ignorance
Let us spend our time in education.

When you know that the world is shining brightly, you will defeat the enemy, and let us also reach the level of knowledge to defeat the ignorance.

Time is an asset and let us not waste it. It is a lifeline.

Do you know that the country and its people are waiting for us to sacrifice our lives for our parents?

Destroy the scourge of migration and throw your hopes into the future and give peace to your country.

My school is old, and my knowledge is good, and it is with a great effort. For the knowledgeable teachers.

Thanks to God.

** CARE has been a main implementer of FCDO’s Girls Education Challenge (GEC)-funded programming in Somalia since 2014. The current iteration of GEC programming in Somalia and Somaliland, the Somali Girls’ Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T), aims to bring about sustainable improvements to the learning and transition outcomes of marginalized Somali girls in rural and remote areas.*

Life skills development is one of the programme’s intermediate outcomes. It is expected that improvements in life skills will improve girls’ retention, participation and completion in school, advancements across grades, and enrolment for girls who are currently not in school. The theory of change posits that girls with a strong sense of empowerment are more likely to be able to negotiate for their rights in household decision-making and to want to stay in school, as they are more likely to recognise the value of schooling and their own potential. Improvements are also expected to positively impact learning outcomes, as girls’ ability to engage in classroom discussions increase and they become more likely to attend school consistently. Empowered girls are equipped with leadership competencies that improve their self-confidence, long-term vision, voice assertiveness, organisation and planning skills.

Changing Lives - Girls with Disabilities

Nine-year-old Zainab¹² lives in the Sool region of Somaliland, where her family relies on goat herding as their main source of income. In many ways, Zainab's life resembles that of other Somali girls her age – she helps with household chores, attends the lower primary school in her village, and plays with her nine siblings.

Fourteen-year-old Guled¹³ lives in the Togdheer region. He is the oldest son out of six children. Guled is close with his siblings and his parents work hard to offer him and his siblings an education. Zainab and Guled were both born with disabilities – Zainab, a cleft lip, and Guled with the right side of his body paralyzed. Zainab is in grade 3 and attends class with the other children in her village but has always felt different from them because of her disability. Her self-esteem has suffered as a result, and she is shy both with her teachers and the other students. Guled is in grade 2. His education began with home-schooling because he was unable to walk to the nearest school with his siblings; but the home-schooling was expensive, and his parents were not always able to afford a teacher. Guled's inability to attend school left him feeling isolated from his siblings and other children his age.

The challenges Zainab and Guled face are common among children with disabilities (CwD) in Somaliland. Chief among the barriers they face is the enormous social stigma associated with disability – because of this stigma, disabilities are often kept secret and few children who have them attend school. CwDs also face an increased risk of harassment, bullying, and violence, which negatively affects their self-esteem and further reduces their attendance and retention, and inhibits learning. At a systemic level, government ministries and communities lack the resources required to support the special needs of CwDs. Schools do not have the specialized staff or infrastructure – like ramps or transport services – needed to support their education, and there are very few facilities that are tailored specifically to support those who would require alternative means of education, such as children who are deaf or blind.

The Somali Girls' Education Promotion Program – Transition (SOMGEP-T) is working to address these barriers. Broadly, SOMGEP-T aims to bring about sustainable improvements in learning and transition outcomes of marginalized Somali girls living in rural and remote areas, but the program includes a number of activities aimed specifically at supporting CwDs. The program provides specialized equipment and learning materials to CwDs. It also includes training for Ministry of Education (MoE) staff, teachers, and community education committees (CECs) on identifying various types of disabilities, providing targeted support to families with CwDs, and assessing and supporting the needs of CwDs. Lastly, the program provides psycho-social counseling to develop self-esteem and treat depression and anxiety.

Both Zainab and Guled were selected to receive support under SOMGEP-T. CARE partnered with a private hospital network – Manhal Group - to cover all expenses associated with the operation needed to repair Zainab's cleft lip in Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital. Manhal paid for the surgery itself, while CARE handled the other costs associated with the process. Her family describes the support she received as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Following her operation, Zainab's confidence has grown, and she is more comfortable interacting with the other children in her school. Guled was identified by the CEC in his community as a child who would benefit from targeted support and he received a wheelchair through SOMGEP-T. The support he received has transformed not only Guled's life, but his family's as well. During an interview about his experiences with the program, Guled explains:

“I was always sad seeing my young brothers going to school. I was not able to learn everyday as my parents could not afford to hire the teacher every day. The

¹² Name has been changed

¹³ Name has been changed

wheelchair has transformed my life. I am very happy going to school and being in the same class with others. I can now even play games with my friends, and I really like my school.”

The head teacher at his school now describes Guled as a bright student who engages actively with other students in his classes.

Mohamed, Guled’s younger brother, is thrilled to have his brother with him in school. As Mohamed explains, “We are very happy to be going to school with our brother. It was sad having to leave him at home every day.” Guled is even able to go to the soccer fields with his brother to watch their favorite teams play. When asked what he wants to do when he grows up, Guled describes his desire to help others:

“I want to become a doctor so that I can treat children like me who are living with disabilities. I want to provide better opportunities for them and my community. I also want to make sure my family gets anything they want.”

Evidence CARE has gathered since the beginning of SOMGEP-T suggests that, in addition to having a direct impact on the lives of CwDs like Zainab and Guled, the program has made headway in raising awareness among parents, community members, teachers, and ministry officials on the need to provide additional support to this vulnerable group.

MoE officials involved in the program have described different efforts they are taking to expand the education system’s reach to previously excluded groups such as CwD, while acknowledging that severe financial constraints still pose a major barrier to providing the necessary support. At the community level, CEC members are increasingly taking an active role in tracking the attendance of CwDs and encouraging teachers and other students to improve their treatment of CwDs. As one CEC member explains, “We as the CEC call and convince students with disability to come and pursue education. We motivate them often and we tell teachers to give them special care when they come to school. We also raise awareness about disability education and caution other students against insulting or discouraging them.” Changing the attitudes of community members is especially important, because research conducted during SOMGEP-T has consistently shown that children with disabilities face bullying and harassment in schools and that their parents may keep them out of school due to fear they will be bullied.

Although there are still many barriers to address, these results suggest the SOMGEP-T program has contributed to progress in addressing the social stigma and resource barriers that inhibit education for children with disabilities.

Stopping Corporal Punishment

Although corporal punishment is unlawful in some settings in Somaliland, in other locations and elsewhere in Somalia, children may lawfully be hit or hurt under the guise of discipline in the home, alternative care settings, day care, schools, and in the penal system. Corporal punishment remains a widespread issue in schools – in a 2017 Save the Children study in Somalia, 84% of sampled students reported witnessing other students undergoing at least one form of corporal punishment, the most common of which were beating, kneeling, and standing out in the sun. CARE observed similarly high levels of corporal punishment in classrooms before it began its Somali Girls' Education Promotion Program (SOMGEP) activities in 2013.

Corporal punishment is a major barrier to learning, as it causes fear among students and exacerbates absenteeism and drop-out. The effects of corporal punishment are of particular concern among over-age and displaced adolescents who are already struggling to learn. Unfortunately, in the Somali context, the disciplinary approach has historically been widely supported by teachers, parents, and community members. As a result, students are unlikely to report incidents of abuse.

CARE has been a main implementer of FCDO's Girl's Education Challenge (GEC)-funded programming in Somalia and Somaliland since 2013. The current iteration of the GEC-funded SOMGEP program, SOMGEP-T, also supported by USAID, aims to bring about sustainable improvements to the learning and transition outcomes of marginalized Somali girls living in rural and remote areas. The program includes various activities to address corporal punishment, including working with community education committees (CECs) and teachers to put in place and enforce codes of conduct, promoting community-managed self-monitoring of community efforts, and encouraging teachers to employ positive disciplinary measures.

Hassan¹⁴ Primary School is one of the SOMGEP-T intervention schools in Somaliland. Hassan Primary, like other SOMGEP-T intervention schools, has received support aimed at curbing corporal punishment. SOMGEP-T has trained both teachers and CECs on the benefits of eradicating corporal punishment and modeled alternative ways to solve issues in and out of the classroom. School authorities work closely with the CEC to monitor whether teachers are using corporal punishment and report child protection cases to the Ministry of Education when appropriate.

Mohamoud¹⁵, who is the chair of the CEC, has noticed positive changes in the school environment as a result of these activities. He explains, "There used to be a civil war in this school. It was very difficult to control the students. There was chaos in the school, and the teachers would get frustrated and beat the students. Now, the school is more organized." According to the head of the school, under the program's guidance and training, the school has developed other strategies to encourage discipline in the school, including engaging the CEC in resolving conflicts and building trust and respect between teachers and students.

Mohamoud has also observed reductions in corporal punishment outside of the school. As he explains, "Parents in the community are also now aware on 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."

These positive results – both in schools and in the community as a whole – appear to be leading to shifts in community attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment. When asked to share lessons learned on the SOMGEP-T program, the chairman of the Hassan Primary School CEC said, "My advice to other schools is to eradicate corporal punishment. With no corporal punishment, we can even boost learning for our students. It helps both the students and the community. Schools should also establish CECs with dedicated members – in our school, even the district commissioner is a

¹⁴ Name has been changed

¹⁵ Name has been changed

member of the CEC. We do daily visits to monitor the situation in our school, and the school has become a better place for our children.”

Preliminary results suggest these shifts in attitudes are common across the SOMGEP-T intervention schools. Increasingly, teachers are opting to talk to students, offer advice and encouragement, and set up conferences with administrators and/or parents rather than resort to corporal punishment. There is also a general understanding that corporal punishment has a negative impact on learning, suggesting the SOMGEP-T sensitization activities are having the desired effect. During an evaluation to understand the effectiveness of the program, one teacher shared, “I think students shouldn’t be punished. Beating students doesn’t make students better students. Beating only makes the situation worse, and it might not help students. So, I think students need to be given advice and not punishment.”

As the program continues, the expectation is that observed and reported instances of corporal punishment will decrease as communities like those surrounding the Hassan Primary School continue to witness first-hand the benefits of curbing corporal punishment.

Learning Opportunities for Out-of-School Girls (ALP and ABE)

18-year-old Nura¹⁶ lives in Elmi¹⁷ village with her mother and ten siblings. Her mother is now the head of the household because her father is ill and being cared for by his siblings in Bader¹⁸. 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 5 are able to attend school.

“My mom 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 where every girl aspires, but these circumstances prevent us.”

– Nura, ALP participant

Hodho¹⁹ is a 14-year-old Somali girl living in Godale²⁰ village. She too lives 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.”

Both Nura and Hodho currently reside in target villages for the Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T). SOMGEP-T aims to bring about sustainable improvements to the learning and transition outcomes of marginalized Somali girls living in rural and remote areas. CARE has been implementing the FCDO/ USAID-funded Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) programming in Somalia since 2013 and is leading the SOMGEP-T programme in Nura and Hodho's villages. Based on their backgrounds and the difficulties they have faced accessing formal schooling, both girls were selected to participate in SOMGEP-T alternative learning programs. SOMGEP-T offers two main alternative learning programs: The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program. ALP was mainly designed to target girls who have dropped out of school to allow them to catch up with their peers and move back into the formal schooling system. Like Nura, many of the girls who attend ALP are older girls whose circumstances in life have made it difficult for them to consistently attend school. Financial constraints, marriage, and children are among the main barriers to schooling ALP girls face.

ABE was designed after the results of the SOMGEP-T baseline in 2018 revealed that approximately 13,400 more girls were out of school in target areas than originally anticipated. The ABE programming was implemented to support the acquisition of foundational skills and competencies for out-of-school girls in remote and rural communities and provide them with an additional point of transition into formal schooling. The ABE programme specifically targets girls, like Hodho, who are 10-15 years old, have never been enrolled in any form of primary school, and are from displaced pastoralist families. Girls participating in the programme spend one year completing level 1 and 2 of the learning programme, with the goal of joining a formal primary school for grade 3.

Attending an alternative learning programme has been transformational for both Nura and Hodho.

¹⁶ Name has been changed

¹⁷ Name has been changed

¹⁸ Name has been changed

¹⁹ Name has been changed

²⁰ Name has been changed

Nura is now able to read English and Somali and has discovered a passion for math, 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 favorite subjects are math and Somali. She attends school every day except when she is sick and her mother is prioritizing her education over household chores. As she explains, "When home chores come along during school hours, my mom tells me to stop and go to school."

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

"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 program, as I hope to join formal school."

– Hodho, ABE participant

"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 a big 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, ALP participant

By the time of the SOMGEP-T program's second midline in 2019, roughly 1,500 girls had been reached by the ABE programme and 2,000 reached by the ALP. Over the life of the SOMGEP-T program, CARE has worked with Ministry of Education officials in target areas to promote non-formal education and incorporate non-formal education models into the national education framework. The aim is for girls like Nura and Hodho, whose unique circumstances have either led them to drop out or prevented them from ever attending school, to gain access to basic education.

Disability-Focused Interventions

Background

In Somalia, adults and children with disabilities face intense stigmatisation. Children with disabilities suffer from a lack of access to education and – even when they gain access – often face discrimination from teachers and peers.²¹ Children with mental disabilities are at risk of sexual abuse and being chained and individuals with mental disabilities are, more generally, hidden away.²² This case study focuses on how disability interventions implemented as part of the GEC-funded SOMGEP-T programme impacted educational inclusion of children with disabilities. Disability-related activities included: 1) disability-inclusivity training for Ministry of Education (MOE) officials, 2) inclusion training for Community Education Committees (CECs) and teachers, 3) community awareness-raising, 4) identification of children with disabilities, 5) review and revision of school curricula to incorporate inclusive education, and 6) support and medical treatment for children with disabilities. This case study reviews the evidence for SOMGEP-T's effectiveness in increasing access to education for girls with disabilities (GWDs).

The case study relies on analysis of key informant interviews (KIIs) with MOE officials and school-age girls (with and without disabilities). It also includes secondary analysis of CARE's internal monitoring data and data from household surveys conducted during SOMGEP-T's external evaluations. It includes analysis of enrolment rates, barriers to enrolment, and self-esteem among GWDs.

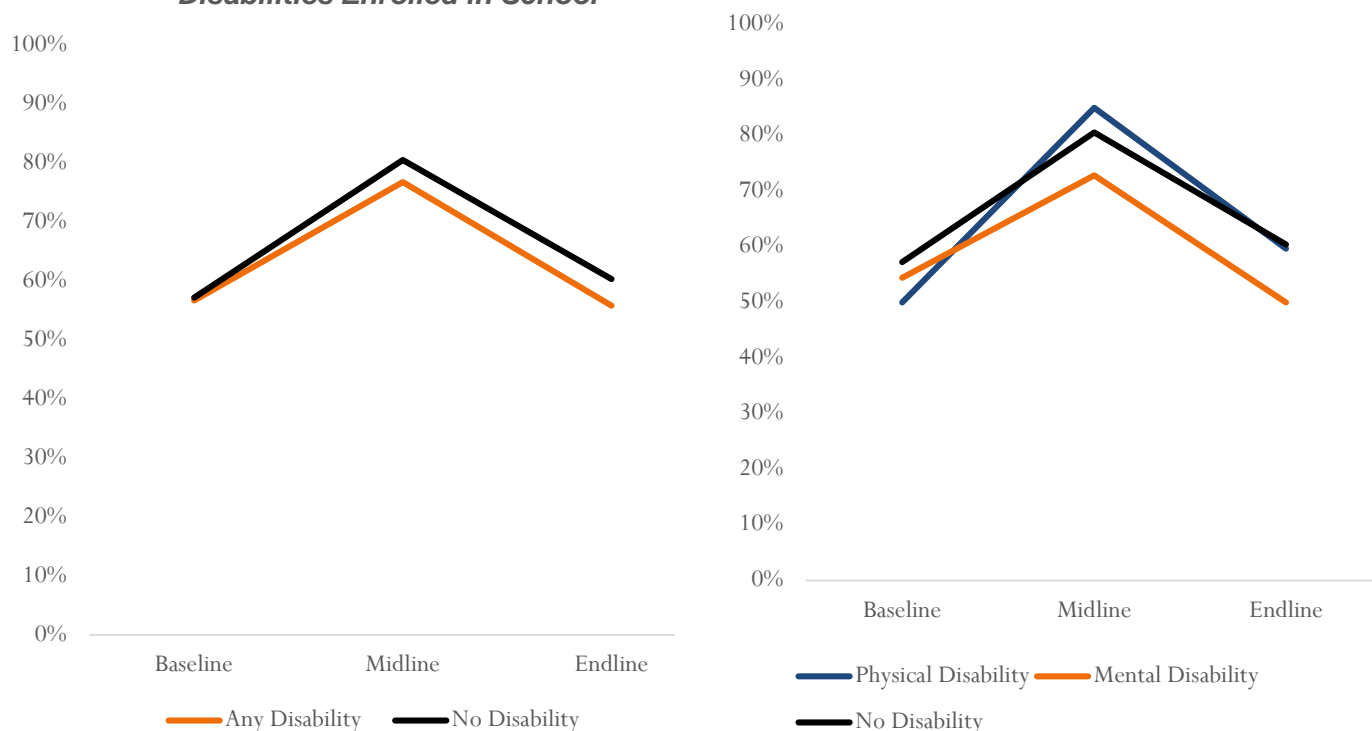
Findings

In many ways, enrolment is the foundation of educational inclusion. GWDs kept pace with girls without disabilities in terms of enrolment in all three evaluations (see Figure 1). However, when disability was disaggregated, it became clear that enrolment rates differed in important ways depending on the type of disability. Girls with mental disabilities had far lower enrolment than girls without disabilities or girls with physical disabilities. By the endline evaluation, only 50% of girls with mental disabilities were enrolled (lower than their baseline) compared to 60% enrolment among both girls with physical disabilities and girls without disabilities. Indeed, girls with physical disabilities had “caught up” in enrolment levels to girls without disabilities by the time of the endline, despite enrolling at a lower rate – by 3 percentage points – at baseline.

²¹ Disability in Somalia. K4D. 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/266-Disability-in-Somalia.pdf>

²² Children with Disabilities in Somaliland: A Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Household Survey. Handicap International and CESVI. 2012. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/Somaliland%20Children%20with%20Disabilities%20KAP.pdf>

Figure 1. Percentage of Girls with Disabilities Enrolled in School



Lower enrolment rates may be driven by mistreatment – or expected mistreatment – at the hands of teachers. Caregivers of girls with mental disabilities were significantly more likely than caregivers of other girls to report that the girl was not enrolled because she is mistreated by her teacher. Again, the type of disability matters: caregivers of girls with physical disabilities were no more or less likely to report mistreatment by teachers than caregivers of girls without disabilities.

Bullying by peers is also an important barrier. Caregivers did not view bullying by other children or students to be a major factor in reducing enrolment among GWDs – while bullying occurs and inhibits enrolment, it was not viewed – by caregivers – as a bigger barrier for GWDs than for other girls. But other data suggests bullying by peers is both very common and a significant barrier. When girls participating in focus group discussions were read a story about a hypothetical girl (Zulheika) with a physical disability, participants almost universally agreed that Zulheika would drop out of school. A majority of girls believed that peer bullying would drive Zulheika to drop out. Most participants did not believe the teacher would bully her, but some participants believed that community members, writ large, would ridicule Zulheika, in addition to children and other students. The role stigma plays in preventing GWD from attending school was a common theme across interviews and evaluations. However, some MOE officials indicated that awareness-raising and training was enough to successfully address stigma in their districts. In interviews conducted for this study, MOE officials invariably identified stigma as an important current issue. Participants identified posters, radios, and trainings as the primary ways SOMGEP-T had addressed stigma but it remained a problem in most communities.

Social stigma almost certainly contributes to lower self-esteem and self-confidence among GWDs, whose self-esteem was significantly lower than girls without disabilities throughout the life of the programme. This difference was starkest among girls with mental disabilities, who tended to have lower self-esteem than those with physical disabilities. Importantly, both GWDs and girls without disabilities, across intervention and comparison schools, experienced large improvements in self-esteem over the project’s lifecycle. Over the same time period, there has been an increase in the share of adolescent girls who believe children with disabilities have a right to go to school, which may reflect a reduction in stigma or an increased inclusivity at a social level.

In addition to social barriers, MOE officials highlighted the importance of physical barriers to GWDs' inclusion and learning, including both individual- (e.g., vision or hearing impairments) and school-level barriers (such as wheelchair inaccessibility and a non-inclusive curriculum). These limitations were echoed in interviews with adolescent girls, who emphasised the physical barriers Zulheika – the girl in the fictional story – would face navigating the classroom, saying it would be too difficult for her to come to school.

Despite the immense social and physical challenges facing GWDs, KIs with MOE officials suggest that there have been mixed improvements in the ability of GWDs to attend and succeed at school. Most MOE officials were able to describe specific programs designed to help GWDs. The interventions – some of which were sponsored by CARE – tended to be broad, including stigma training for teachers and the community, provision of school fees and supplies, and the creation of private schools for children with disabilities.

By the time of the endline evaluation, completed in December 2021, progress on inclusion of GWDs seemed to be both marginal and inconsistent. For instance, two MOE officials stated that there was still a total lack of programming specifically for GWDs in their regions. In our primary data collection, two officials working with the Special Needs Education divisions of the MOE in Somaliland and Puntland were more positive, saying that CARE's provision of disability aids such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and glasses had greatly assisted children with disabilities in attending school, but a third official in Galmudug argued that few students had received such aids and their efforts had not been very effective.

The awareness of issues facing GWDs appeared to increase among MOE interviewees throughout the project period. The emphasis on physical barriers that appeared in the midline may be from CARE's training efforts among MOE staff. However, improvement in both awareness and reduction of barriers was largely dependent on regional implementation. All interviewees said that it would be difficult to continue implementation of programming for GWDs after the end of SOMGEP-T, leaving the progress made in awareness-raising and medical support uncertain.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Work

Overall, GWD appear to be enrolling in school at broadly similar rates to girls without disabilities. While enrollment increased among both groups during the two midline evaluations (in 2018 and 2019), enrolment returned to near-baseline levels in the endline for both GWDs and girls without disabilities. This suggests that many of the factors driving enrolment and non-enrolment – especially external shocks, such as COVID-19 and a deepening drought in many SOMGEP-T communities – are shared across groups. To some degree, interventions that effectively improve enrolment for girls without disabilities may raise enrolment among GWDs as well.

A key finding is that girls with different types of disability face different starting points and trends, in terms of enrolment, self-esteem, and other outcomes. Girls with mental disabilities enrolled at lower rates than other girls, a gap that has widened over time. Girls with physical disabilities had an even lower starting point, in terms of enrolment, but made greater gains over the life of the programme. It may be that equipment provided through the programme assisted those with physical disabilities, but support and medical treatment for those with social or cognitive disabilities is more difficult, less available, or less effective.

Social stigma around disability remains a major concern, though there are signs of improvement. Stigma appears to come, most commonly, from other children, rather than teachers or community members, although community opinions on this point appear to be mixed. SOMGEP-T programming – which focused almost exclusively on training teachers and community members on stigma – may have helped here, but there may also have been a missed opportunity to raise awareness among and reduce stigma coming specifically from other students.

The evaluation and internal data are limited in that they cannot provide a direct link between SOMGEP-T's interventions targeting GWDs and either enrolment or improved attitudes toward

GWDs. One concern with the data is that children with more severe disabilities may attend private schools and would not have been interviewed for these evaluations, while those children with less severe disabilities may attend public (SOMGEP-T) schools. If that is the case, the true gaps in enrolment and other outcomes between GWDs and girls without disabilities may be starker than this data suggests.

Teacher training and community awareness-raising appear to be effective in reducing stigma felt by GWDs enrolled in school. However, GWDs have significantly lower self-esteem, which could lead to increased dropout rates; empowerment programs specifically designed for them would be valuable. In addition, the provision of medical treatment to girls with physical disabilities may have been the key in keeping them in school at similar rates as girls without disabilities. More research and planning should go into how to achieve similar results among girls with mental disabilities.

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs)

Background

Originally developed by CARE in Niger, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are nowadays a common financial empowerment tool, used to increase capital-generating activities in communities where savings rates are low or access to finance may be limited. SOMGEP-T, implemented by CARE, has utilised VSLAs as one tool to increase girls' education in Somalia, based on the idea that increased availability of loans will reduce financial barriers to enrolment in school or reduce the need for girls to drop out of school to work. This case study investigates whether VSLAs established through SOMGEP-T influenced the educational inclusion of marginalised girls, including those from pastoralist, low-income, female-headed, or displaced households, and those who have been orphaned.

Secondary analyses were performed with both internal data from CARE on the VSLAs they support and the project's external evaluations, including household surveys with girls – both enrolled in school and out-of-school – and their family members on marginalisation status, enrolment, and participation in VSLAs.

Marginalisation has many dimensions and the data we employ occasionally focused on different aspects of marginalisation. The internal datasets provided by CARE defined marginalisation according to one of the following three categories: internally-displaced persons (IDPs), pastoralists, and members of a minority group. In contrast, girls were classified as marginalised in the external evaluation data if their household was headed by a woman, engaged in pastoralism, experienced economic hardship – reported going hungry or without clean water most days in the last year – or if either the girl's mother or father was deceased.²³ To understand the intersection between multiple dimensions of marginalisation, we classified households from zero to four, based on the number of dimensions on which they were marginalised. A score of four meant the girl lived in a female headed-household, lived in a pastoralist household, was orphaned, and experienced economic hardship. A score of one to three represented a combination of any three of the different dimensions.

Findings

CARE's internal monitoring data provides an inside look at the composition of VSLAs and how much money they save and lend. Of the 78 VSLAs sponsored by SOMGEP-T, 46 (59%) included pastoralists as members, 18 (23.1%) included IDPs, and 5 (6%) included members of a minority ethnic group or clan. In total, 73% of the VSLAs included representation from at least one marginalised group. Marginalised groups were not given token representation, either – the average VSLA included 4.4 pastoralists, or 22.4% of the typical group's total membership. VSLAs were also overwhelmingly comprised of women, a fact that is notable, given the intersectional barriers faced by women who are IDPs or from minority clans.

Participation by marginalised groups may not be helpful if the VSLAs they join are defunct or perform more poorly than others. Marginalised members actually tend to join groups that are either equally or slightly more active than the average VSLA. For instance, VSLAs with at least one member of a marginalised group saved an average of \$712, compared to \$662 in VSLAs with no members of marginalised groups. There was also no difference in the amount of money lent out between those VSLAs with and without a member of a marginalised group. In fact, VSLAs whose membership was composed of more than 50% people from marginalised groups saw a slight increase in their total savings (\$824 vs. \$666). Despite the relatively weaker economic standing of pastoralists, IDPs, and minority clans, they do not appear to be relegated to lower-performing VSLAs, on average.

²³ The external evaluation data is combined across multiple rounds because answers regarding VSLA membership and marginalisation could change at any point during the programme.

The findings from internal monitoring of VSLAs by CARE are complicated somewhat by data from household surveys completed during the baseline, midline, and endline evaluations. Survey respondents were asked about VSLA membership and whether they had taken a loan from a VSLA to pay school expenses. Households in Somaliland and households in intervention areas were more likely to join a VSLA, regardless of marginalisation status. However, as Table 1 shows, all four groups we defined as marginalised were significantly less likely to join VSLAs than non-marginalised households, often by large margins. For instance, 12% of female-headed households were participants in a VSLA, compared to 17% among non-marginalised households. In addition – as shown in Table 2 – households facing multiple dimensions of marginalisation (indicated by a higher marginalisation score) were less likely to join a VSLA.

Table 1: VSLA membership and enrolment rates among marginalised groups

Group	Total	Enrolment Rate	Member in a VSLA	Percent in VSLA	Used Education Loans	Percent Using Loan for Education
No Marginalisation	2689	73.6%	461	17.3%	66	14.3%
Economic	710	70.1%*	83	11.7%*	13	15.7%
Orphan	922	70.3%*	113	12.3%*	16	14.2%
Pastoralist	630	65.1%*	53	8.4%*	7	13.2%
Female HoH	3224	75.0%	393	12.2%*	70	17.8%

Asterisks (*) indicate significant value (as compared to the no marginalisation category).

Table 2: VSLA membership and enrolment rates by marginalisation score

Marginalisation Score	Total	Enrolment Rate	Member in a VSLA	Percent in VSLA	Used Education Loans	Percent Using Loan for Education
0	2689	73.6%	461	17.3%	66	14.3%
1	2948	74.4%	381	12.9%*	57	15.0%
2	1029	71.0%	108	10.5%*	20	18.5%
3	148	68.2%	15	10.1%*	3	20.0%
4	9	44.4%*	0	0%	-	-

Asterisks (*) indicate significant value (as compared to the no marginalisation category).

The tables above also document somewhat lower enrolment rates among most marginalised groups. Girls in pastoralist households were much less likely to be enrolled in school compared to non-marginalised households, regardless of VSLA membership. Orphaned girls and those from economically-marginalised households were also less likely to be enrolled, though the enrolment gap between these groups and non-marginalised girls was smaller. Table 2 shows that marginalisation score is correlated – though somewhat weakly – with lower enrolment rates. The tables above show that marginalisation is associated with less frequent enrolment, but it is not clear whether participation in a VSLA can improve economic status sufficiently to increase enrolment rates. There is a clear correlation between VSLA membership and enrolment status: across all rounds of the external evaluation, 80.3% of girls from VSLA households were enrolled, compared to 69.0% of girls from non-VSLA households. This correlation remains even when we factor in other characteristics that affect enrolment rates, such as region, marginalisation scores, and intervention (exposure to SOMGEP-T programming) status.

Interestingly, the relationship between VSLA membership and enrolment decreased as the programme progressed. At baseline, girls in VSLA households had enrolment rates 17.3 points higher than girls in non-VSLA households ($p < 0.01$), regardless of marginalisation status. However, by the end of SOMGEP-T, girls in VSLA households were only 5.0 points more likely to be enrolled

than girls from non-VSLA households.

There are several possible explanations for these findings. First, CARE's efforts to increase enrolment of all girls may have broadly reduced the barriers to enrolment, reducing the enrolment gap between VSLA and non-VSLA households. Secondly, there was immense growth in VSLA membership over the project period (165% growth between baseline and endline). Increased membership numbers may have stretched VSLA resources and reduced their impact; alternatively, newer members may have had fewer economic resources than long-term members, simply shifting the 'typical' VSLA member toward a poorer household, with lower likelihood of enrolment.²⁴ Lastly, the endline took place after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drove a large decrease in enrolment in the endline. It may be that VSLA membership was not so effective in protecting households from the varied impacts of COVID-19 – financial and otherwise – and thus girls from both VSLA households and non-VSLA households withdrew from school at similar rates. Of course, it is possible that households with greater economic resources are both more likely to join a VSLA and to send their girls to school. This would explain higher enrolment rates among households who participate in VSLAs, even if VSLA membership had no impact on enrolment. However, based on household reporting, VSLA membership seems to reduce financial shortfalls as a barrier to enrolment. For instance, in households with out-of-school girls, respondents were significantly less likely to identify a lack of money as a barrier to enrolment if they were a member of a VSLA (28% versus 37%). While many other barriers remain, the centrality of household finances was reduced.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Work

While minority clans, IDPs, and pastoralists are marginalised in many aspects of Somali society, they were broadly included in the VSLAs supported by CARE. In addition, the VSLAs that included more members of marginalised groups were actually more active, with higher saving and lending rates. While targeted research could help shed light on how the main sources of income and economic standing of marginalised VSLA members compares to other VSLA members, it is clear that VSLAs with marginalised members were at least as productive, in savings and lending terms, as other VSLAs.

Although marginalised households were well-represented in CARE's VSLAs, members of marginalised groups are less likely to join a VSLA. It is possible that VSLAs are less accessible to the most financially vulnerable, who do not have initial funds to save. They may also be less accessible for pastoralists, whose frequent movements may make it more difficult to establish the stability and shared community ties with a single group of people that are necessary for a VSLA to function well.

Overall, VSLA membership is associated with significantly higher enrolment rates. Households that participate in a VSLA are also less likely to cite financial constraints as the justification for their daughter remaining out of school. Although the correlation between VSLA membership and enrolment waned over the project period, this may be due to the impact of other SOMGEP-T interventions that reduced the financial burden of enrolment. It is important to emphasize that this case study cannot establish a causal connection between VSLA participation and enrolment, and research in other contexts have cast doubt on the ability of VSLAs to improve a variety of aspects of child wellbeing, including school enrolment.²⁵ VSLAs are often used for short-term loans to smooth consumption through shocks or cover short-term expenses; this model may not be well-suited to educational investments, which require inputs from many village members at the same time (e.g., when school fees are due). Moreover, the returns to education are typically seen only in the long-term, long after loans to the VSLA must be paid back. Despite these caveats, there is fairly strong correlational evidence that VSLA membership can improve household economic status and, by extension, educational inclusion for girls from marginalised households.

²⁴ Note, however, that the relative proportion of marginalised to non-marginalised VSLA members did not change significantly during the project.

²⁵ The Impact of Savings Groups on Children's Wellbeing: A Review of the Literature. USAID and FHI360. 2015. https://mangotree.org/files/galleries/1742_STRIVE_SG_Child_Wellbeing_Literature_Review_final.pdf

Learning Paper - The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Framework and Its Impact on Teacher Training and Participatory Governance

Background

Educational outcomes in Somalia and Somaliland, particularly among girls, are poor. Only half of girls 15-19 have ever attended school.²⁶ At younger ages, boys and girls attend school at similar rates but at the age of 13, the gender gap increases, as girls begin to drop out due – in part – to early marriage. The gender gap in education is not unique to this context and the Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) approach has been used with success in other countries. GESI can be used as a lens to understand where the needs of girls and other stigmatized groups are not being met within a variety of institutions. In addition, GESI can be utilized as a framework when providing trainings or other interventions to ensure that all interventions promote gender equality and inclusion of marginalized or stigmatized groups. The GESI framework has specifically been used to address issues in girls' education, including in Somalia and Somaliland.

Between 2017 and 2021, CARE was responsible for the implementation of the FCDO/USAID GEC-funded Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T) in Somaliland, Puntland, and Galmudug. SOMGEP-T's purpose was to improve learning outcomes and increase transition rates in both girls and boys within its target communities. The GESI framework was deeply embedded in the programme's design, including in the schools they targeted – remote, rural communities populated by groups, especially pastoralists, who face particular barriers to educational attainment. The GESI framework was also embedded in the programme's design in terms of the interventions chosen at the system, community, and individual levels, which included efforts to bring pastoralist and other marginalised girls into school, promote the representation of women in the teaching corps, and implement Girls' Empowerment Forums, among others.

Evaluation

External evaluations were completed by Forcier Consulting and Consilient in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021. These mixed-methods evaluations collected data from students, teachers, members of the community, and Ministry of Education (MOEs) officials. Importantly, focus groups with teachers and members of the Community Education Committees, in addition to key informant interviews with MOEs officials provided information on how the GESI framework impacted teacher training and participatory governance. Secondly, household surveys conducted with female students and their caregivers provided information on how teachers interacted treated female students, from their perspective and that of their caregivers. Lastly, classroom observations conducted by CARE provided a more comprehensive picture of how teachers interacted with female students over the course of the programme.

Impact of GESI

We can evaluate the impact of the GESI framework on teacher training and participatory governance at four distinct levels. First, the MOEs were supported by SOMGEP to create a Gender Unit which was responsible for improving equity within the education system and GESI trainings were provided to MOEs officials. Second, training was provided to CECs on the importance of girls' education and of the education of children with disabilities. This training utilized a GESI lens to stress the importance of girls staying in school and being supported. Third, at the level of individual teachers, SOMGEP-T provided training to improve teaching quality and, less commonly, training on gender-sensitive methods. While less specific to girls' education, the improvement of teaching quality may encourage girls to stay in school or perform better on exams. We examine the impacts

²⁶ Somali National Bureau of Statistics. 2020. "Somali Health and Demographic Survey 2020." Data provided by SNBS: <http://microdata.nbs.gov.so/>

of the GESI focus at each of these levels, analysing whether the GESI focus has altered, for instance, the manner in which CECs operate. Lastly, we look at how these interventions trickled down to the girls themselves. We study whether girls' attitudes towards their teachers changed over the project period and how they felt they were treated in the classroom compared to boys.

Effect on MOEs

The GESI framework was implemented within SOMGEP-T's MOEs work in two distinct ways: the formation of the Gender Unit within the MOEs and trainings – sometimes led by the Gender Unit – provided to regional educational officers (REOs) and other personnel affiliated with the educational system. Gender Units were widely adopted within Galmudug, Puntland, and Somaliland, with almost all of the REOs interviewed during programme evaluations reporting awareness of the Gender Unit. However, the endline evaluation in late 2021 found that the Gender Units had either closed, lost funding, or been absorbed into another part of the MOEs since the end of SOMGEP-T. Reports from REOs varied on whether the work was being continued despite budget shortfalls or absorption into other divisions of the MOEs; they also varied in terms of whether employees were still being paid. During SOMGEP-T, while the Gender Units were operational, Gender Unit staff focused largely on female teacher training and enrolment of girls into school. In addition, Gender Unit staff engaged in activities aimed at child protection and the reduction of gender-based violence within schools. The Gender Unit provided a critical link in the MOE infrastructure, addressing many of the barriers that prevent girls from continuing successfully in school.

REOs also reported that MOEs officials had received training on disability and corporal punishment, among other issues – both topics that frequently utilize a GESI framework. The intent of these trainings was to increase awareness among MOEs officials of the issues surrounding girls' education and education for other marginalised groups. However, many REOs said there was little funding outside of external assistance, which left the gains made through the Gender Units and training for REOs susceptible to backsliding when SOMGEP-T and other forms of assistance ended. It is also unclear the extent to which REOs or other staff can incorporate the knowledge gained into their own work, given the barriers – financial and logistical (i.e. a lack of funds to support visiting remote schools) – they face in completing their existing workload.

Effect on the CEC

With regards to GESI, the CEC primarily plays two roles: to engage in child protection and reduce physical punishment within the classroom and to encourage students to either enrol or stay in school. Active CECs typically monitor aspects of school administration, teacher performance, and student attendance and retention. They also engage with parents and children to raise awareness regarding the importance of education; they conduct concerted “enrolment drives” at the start of the year; and follow-up with students who have dropped out or appear to be on the cusp of dropping out, to bring them back into the school.

While baseline data was not collected for these metrics, the endline quantitative data combined with the qualitative data provides us with an indication of how GESI training influenced the operation of a typical CEC. In total, 62% of CECs in intervention (programme) schools encouraged teachers to use non-violent punishment in their classrooms. There was large variation between geographic zones – just 50% of CECs in Somaliland encouraged non-violent punishment, compared to 66% and 83% in Galmudug and Puntland, respectively. Similarly, only 54% of Somaliland CECs addressed child protection issues while nearly all the CECs (92% and 100%, respectively) in Puntland and Galmudug CECs addressed child protection issues. While CECs were more likely to have a plan for child protection issues at the endline compared to the baseline, this same trend occurred in comparison (non-programme) schools that the SOMGEP-T evaluation tracked as well. This positive trend in both intervention and comparison schools limits our ability to point to GESI training of CECs as the cause of the improvement; at the same time, the fact that CECs in comparison schools also improved hints at the possibility that systemwide efforts to promote GESI – described in the previous section – may have filtered down to CECs, including those where SOMGEP-T was not actively working. In Puntland in particular, SOMGEP-T's GESI-focused CEC training model had

been scaled up across the state by a system strengthening program supported by CARE. CECs are also one of the many groups that focus on re-enrolling students or encouraging students to stay in school. This is especially critical for gender equity because – as noted above – girls are far more likely to drop out of school than boys of the same age. In total, 67% of CECs promoted enrolment of out-of-school children, a finding that did not differ dramatically across geographic zones. The fact that CECs encourage students and parents regarding enrolment was a frequent theme in focus groups conducted with CEC members. Some even said they had taken further action, including directly paying for the girls to attend school or providing bursaries: “This committee is in touch with the families of girls attending school; there are girls whose education was paid for by the CEC after learning about their family circumstances”.²⁷

CEC members also felt that community social norms around girls’ education had changed since SOMGEP-T began and that people recognized the value of educating girls. Social inclusion of other marginalised groups was reported by CEC members less consistently, but there were indications of progress on this front as well. For instance, some felt that children with disabilities were more included now than before the programme started, but others felt that children with disabilities continued to face barriers that prevented them from reaching their full potential. CECs also had differing opinions about pastoralist children and the impact of their own efforts and the programme on their enrolment rates: one respondent said, “The pastoralist girls in the rural areas near the town have not made any progress in the city, they keep their daughters in the countryside”.²⁸ In another case, however, CEC members reported that “these improvements have given more opportunities to girls...who are from pastoral families and who have been brought from rural areas so they could learn something”.²⁹

The efforts of CECs are reflected, in part, in improving transition rates and reduced rates of corporal punishment within schools. The programme reduced the number of girls who drop out of school – between 2019 and 2020, 7.9% of girls enrolled in intervention schools dropped out, compared to 11.7% among girls in comparison schools. Over the same time period, intervention schools had a higher re-enrolment rate among girls who were out-of-school in 2019. As interviews with CEC members suggested, the programme did not fundamentally transform the situation of other groups, including pastoralist girls – transition rates among poor households, for instance, improved at the same rate as transition rates among girls more generally.

More starkly, the use of corporal punishment – either observed directly during classroom visits or reported by girls during interviews – dropped precipitously from baseline to endline. For instance, the share of girls reporting that their teacher used physical punishment on them in the past week dropped from 43.2% to 23.0% in intervention schools over this period; while there was also a decline in comparison schools, it was much smaller, suggesting that a combination of CEC efforts, teacher training, and awareness-raising was effective in reducing teachers’ use of corporal punishment.

Effect on teachers

Teachers were a focal point for trainings during SOMGEP-T. After two years of implementation, in 2019, 121 teachers had received training on inclusive pedagogical practices alone; hundreds of teachers also received training on subject-specific teaching practices, ALP and ABE teaching, and approximately 400 teachers received targeted coaching from MOEs or SOMGEP-T staff.

At the same time, head teachers described fewer trainings than one would expect related to gender-sensitive methods, given SOMGEP-T’s emphasis on GESI and reports that the MOEs Gender Units provided gender-sensitive trainings while operational. Only 8.1% of head teachers reported any female teachers within their schools receiving gender-sensitive training in the year prior to the endline, and only 13.5% reported any male teachers receiving the same training. Training efforts tapered off in the final year of programming, in part due to the school closures and dislocations

²⁷ FGD with CEC Members, Puntland, Int. 108.

²⁸ FGD with CEC Members, Puntland, Int. 109.

²⁹ FGD with CEC Members, Puntland, Int. 108.

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – training rates were higher when reported in 2019, but still seem more limited than expected. In 2019, 35.1% of intervention schools had at least one teacher trained on inclusive teaching methods, who was expected to cascade the training to other teachers within the school.

Of course, even if relatively few teachers are trained in a given year, the impact of training should endure beyond the life of the programme, generating greater impact in this way. It appears that at least some teachers may have already received training before SOMGEP-T started – a fact which the programme and its schools would have benefitted from – though this slightly contradicts qualitative reports from REOs in the endline evaluation, where several implied that teachers had received training frequently and, at times, specifically through a GESI lens: “There are specific female teachers that have been trained to improve the quality of the poor girls’ education and to encourage them”.³⁰ It is possible REOs are describing training on pedagogical techniques for specific subjects or teaching in ALP or ABE settings, which both target girls – a significant number of teachers were trained on each of these topics (e.g., 261 teachers trained on methods for teaching numeracy and 162 teachers trained for service in ALP centres). The hiring of female teachers was commonly mentioned as a reason for improvement in girls’ education but it should be noted that it remains relatively rare to observe more than one female teacher per school.

In endline focus groups, teachers reported improvements to teaching quality related to gender equality in their schools: “[teachers] have been able to teach lessons equally to boys and girls”.³¹ CARE also undertook classroom observations of teachers in supported schools, in which they monitored how teachers interacted with girls compared to boys and whether girls had less access to opportunities or materials compared to boys.

There is also some evidence that teachers supported students outside of the classroom by encouraging them to not drop out. Teachers described taking initiative to ensure that girls and children with disabilities stay enrolled in school: “I help people with special needs like those with hearing impairments. I encourage girls to study... I also go to the girls who have dropped out of school and ask their parents the reason, if I can bring them back, I do”.³² Notably, teachers did not report similar initiatives in the baseline evaluation, though this was not the subject of a direct question in the baseline.

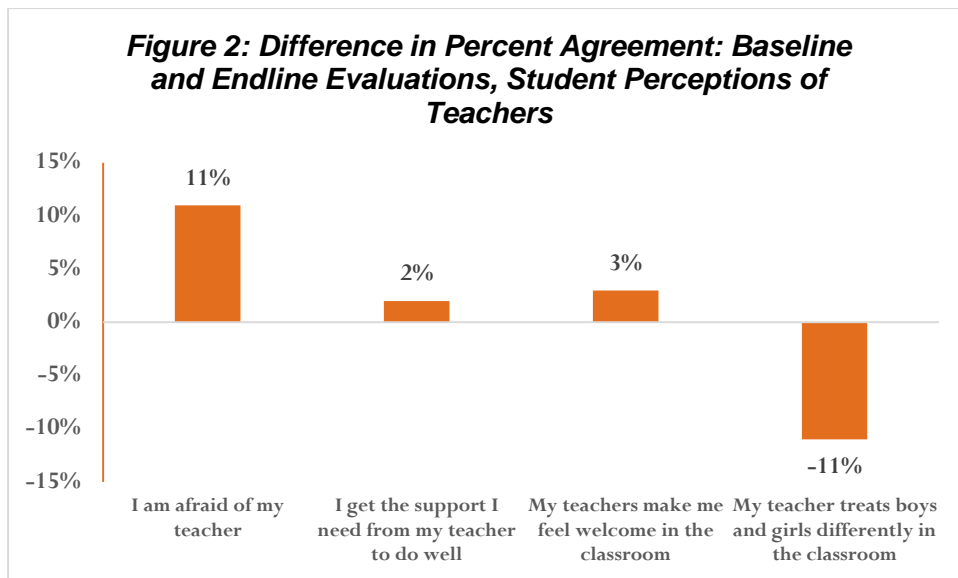
Effect on girls

The effect of GESI on girls was measured through four different measures of gender-inclusive and supportive teaching practices within the evaluation’s surveys with girls. These measures focused on: are the girls afraid of their teacher? Do they get the support they need? Do they feel welcomed by their teacher? And are boys and girls treated differently in the classroom? The below figure demonstrates the difference in percentage of girls agreeing with the evaluation statements between baseline and endline. Interestingly, girls overwhelmingly became more likely to agree that they were afraid of their teacher between baseline and endline. Contradictorily, girls also became more likely to agree that they got the necessary support from teachers, they felt welcomed by the teachers, and that teachers treated boys and girls the same in the classroom. It may be that girls interpreted afraid as a sign of respect for the teacher and thus may have meant that they had more respect for the teacher at the endline.

³⁰ KII with REO, Puntland, Int. 708.

³¹ FGD with Teachers, Somaliland, Int. 208.

³² FGD with Teachers, Galmudug, Int. 209



Conclusion

Overall, SOMGEP-T schools saw notable improvements in several of the downstream outcomes that the programme’s GESI focus sought to influence. For instance, corporal punishment became less common; inclusive teaching practices became more common; and girls became more likely to stay in school. However, it is difficult to attribute these changes to the programme’s GESI orientation because many of the observed improvements were not specific to girls or marginalised groups. Corporal punishment declined across the board. Improvements in enrolment and transition rates improved for both girls, in general, and marginalised girls. But marginalised girls did not see outsized improvements in this area; broad-based impact of this kind is a net positive, but suggests that the entire package of interventions was at play, rather than GESI-focused capacity-building of teachers and CECs exclusively.

One simple explanation for this outcome is the environment of systematic scarcity within which the programme operated. CEC functionality improved over time in essential ways, but CECs can only do so much; efforts targeting the most marginalised tend to be more resource-intensive and may be a second-order focus for CECs. A very similar logic applies to MOEs staff who are constrained in how often they can visit schools, coach teachers, and so forth. Teachers trained on better general pedagogy, the use of formative assessments, alternatives to corporal punishment, *and* inclusive teaching methods may face limitations in how well they can apply any one of these new skills. GESI-focused programming may be more impactful where GESI can be more completely centered within a given activity and where schools or teachers have already achieved a higher degree of competence and functionality in core aspects of their respective roles.

Public-Private Partnerships for Programme Impact: Disability, the Manhal Group, and SOMGEP-T

Project Background and Context

The GEC/USAID-funded Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T) 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 programme began on May 1, 2017 and concluded on October 31, 2021. It was implemented primarily in rural areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug.

The programme focused specifically on marginalised girls, defined as girls who face the intersection of multiple barriers to access 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 barriers and the causes of marginalisation, 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 MoE capacity to deliver quality and relevant formal and informal education.

As noted above, girls with disability were considered a key marginalised group under SOMGEP-T. Children with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing education in Somalia. Although there is no publicly available information on the number of schools or programmes for children with disabilities, ad hoc information suggests there were only 14 specialized schools for children with disabilities and 86 special needs education teachers across the entire country in 2019.³³ As a result, many children with disabilities either attend non-specialized schools with other children from their communities or do not attend school at all. In addition to the general lack of specialized facilities and teaching staff, children with disabilities often experience harmful discrimination from community members and other children, including physical assault, sexual violence, name-calling, and denial of access to services. For children with disabilities in rural areas, these factors are exacerbated by additional challenges such as long distances to schools and a lack of access to assistive devices to help them get to and succeed in school.

To address baseline findings related to marginalisation of children with disabilities, the SOMGEP-T programme incorporated the following activities:

- Training community education committees (CECs) in the identification of different types of disabilities and support to girls and boys with disabilities.
- Working with CECs to liaise with parents of displaced out-of-school girls and girls with disabilities, provide targeted social support and track their attendance.
- Assessing girls with disabilities for placement in regular schools or referrals to special needs facilities.
- Providing specialised equipment and learning materials for girls with disabilities. Assistive devices were provided on the basis of need and included mobility aids, hearing aids,

³³ Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development (MoWHRD) of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Save the Children International. (2020). A Rapid Assessment of the Status of Children with Disabilities in Somalia. Retrieved 2022, from https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/rapid-assessment-children-with-disabilites-in-somalia_report_fa_digital-1-1_1.pdf/.

wheelchairs, glasses and walking equipment. Teaching-learning materials included large-print textbooks, pen grips/holders, and equipment for cognitive and perception development.

- Training Ministry of Education (MoE) staff and teachers to identify and support girls with disabilities, and training teachers and MoE staff on inclusive and special needs education.
- Providing psycho-social counselling for development of self-esteem among girls with disabilities, and mitigating the impact of anxiety and depression.

Formation of the Public-Private Partnership Between SOMGEP-T and the Manhal Hospital Group

Under the programme, activities aimed at supporting children with disabilities were implemented in phases. First, policymakers were trained on inclusive education and gender mainstreaming to encourage support from the ministry on inclusive education in normal school settings. After this training, teachers and mentors at the community level were trained to support children with disabilities. These activities laid the groundwork for creating a more inclusive school environment for children with disabilities.

Once a more supportive environment had been created, the programme pivoted to the next phase: providing direct support to children with disabilities in the community. A training was organized for CECs to identify girls with disabilities in their communities. This allowed the programme to assess the overall need in terms of both overall number of children requiring support and types of support needed. For children with physical disabilities that affect their mobility, wheelchair procurement began at this stage of the programme to enable the children to reach school more comfortably. For children with visual and hearing impairments, programme staff first turned to district and provincial heads of facilities to seek the advice and support of specialized medical personnel. It was during this process that the programme identified the private sector as a potential viable partner.

The traditional approach to providing health support to children in rural communities is to gather and transport the children to health facilities for assessment and potential treatment. This approach comes with significant challenges. Firstly, it is disruptive to the children's guardians, who are required to accompany them on the journey. Secondly, it is expensive and logistically challenging to organize the transport of large numbers of children and their guardians, particularly in very remote areas that are not easily accessible by vehicles and that are long distances (500km+) from the nearest health facility. The public sector actors with whom the programme initially explored partnering proposed this traditional approach.

In this initial scoping phase to identify potential options for providing support to the identified children with disabilities, the programme also contacted a private hospital network, the Manhal Hospital Group. The Manhal Hospital Group is a group of privately-owned, community-based hospitals that provide subsidized medical support. In initial discussions with the headquarters of the Manhal Hospital Group, programme staff identified significant overlap in programme intervention locations and Manhal facilities. Additionally, the Manhal facilities are equipped with specialized equipment and staff, and due to their presence near intervention areas, the group expressed a willingness to assemble mobile units and travel to the target communities to provide support. In recognition that this approach would alleviate the challenges typically associated with providing support to children with disabilities and would also align with the programme's overall goal of reaching the most vulnerable children, the decision was made to move forward with a partnership between SOMGEP-T and the Manhal Hospital Group.

Implementation and Impact of the Partnership

In total, the partnership activities took place over 9 months. Discussions with the Manhal Hospital Group began in April 2021 and implementation in Somaliland began in June 2021. Implementation in Somaliland took place in two phases, the first lasting 23 days and the second 21 days. In Puntland, activities began in November 2021 and lasted for 39 days. In total, 1,857 community members were reached. The effort reached 73 villages in nine districts.

In preparation for the mobile hospital units, an intense mobilization process took place. MoE supervisors and CECs in each target area led the community-level identification of children with disabilities and organized for identified community members to be available on the agreed-upon dates and times. In some areas, this mobilization was so effective that the number of community members identified far exceeded the expected number and included not just girls with disabilities, but also boys and other community members with impairments, including elderly individuals.

The Manhal Hospital Group staff traveled with their specialized equipment and set up tents in each community. The identified community members then moved from tent to tent for assessment and, where possible, on-the-spot treatment. For community members who were not able to reach the tents, the group used all possible means for reaching them, including some home visits and road stops to accommodate those who had to travel from longer distances.

For those who required medicine, like eye ointment, the medicine was provided on the spot, as the mobile unit traveled with supplies purchased from local regional pharmacies. For those who required special assistive equipment, such as eyeglasses, the specifications were recorded and provided at a later date. The Manhal Hospital Group provided free glasses up to a specific cap, and any glasses needed over that cap were provided by the group at a reduced cost (covered by SOMGEP-T). Those who required urgent medical attention or who the hospital staff were not able to help with the available staff and equipment were referred to the nearest Manhal facility for care. SOMGEP-T covered the cost of the transportation and treatment of these referral cases. In addition to assessing the conditions of community members and providing treatment and referrals, the Manhal team provided health awareness to community members, including education to guardians on the care of their disabled children.

During the community visits, the CECs and MoE officials played a critical role not only in mobilizing community members, but also in facilitating the activities of the mobile units once they arrived in a given community. It should be noted that every activity the SOMGEP-T programme implemented was implemented in close collaboration with the MoE. Each quarter, SOMGEP-T staff shared with the MoE the planned activities for that quarter to allow the MoE to prepare and appoint staff to support the activities most relevant to their areas of specialization. To support the mobile units, a programme staff member and an MoE official from the department focusing on special needs were appointed to travel with hospital staff from community to community. Some of these ministry officials are medical experts themselves and were therefore able to assist the hospital staff in examinations. Concurrently, CEC members (community leaders and elders involved in school governance) maintained order, prevented over-crowding, and ensured safety of the equipment, community members, and hospital staff.

Lessons Learned

A Manhal Hospital Group representative interviewed by the CARE team feels it would be possible to expand to additional areas and schools in Somaliland and Puntland in the future and has encouraged the programme to invite other donors to cover non-SOMGEP-T schools. However, there were some key challenges highlighted by CARE staff and the Manhal representative that should be taken into consideration in future partnerships. The team faced terrain and security challenges while traveling, as well as delays, including COVID-related closures and holidays, that pushed timelines and resulted in the activities taking longer than originally anticipated. Staff involved in the effort also report that having more time to plan and assess the effectiveness of the intervention would have improved coordination and provided the partners with important feedback from those involved at the community level (e.g. assisted community members and their caretakers, CEC members, MoE officials). The intervention was also carried out on a short timeline and follow-up was limited to emergency care, thereby limiting the sustainability of some outcomes.

Nevertheless, the intervention was largely lauded as able to adapt to the implementation challenges that arose and effective in addressing the barriers of disabled children to learning. SOMGEP-T staff involved in this hallmark public-private partnership describe it as one of the most unique partnerships that CARE has ever had in Somalia and Somaliland and report receiving numerous inquiries from

other organizations on how the partnership was organized and implemented. The partnership has garnered interest because of its unique solution to reaching the most vulnerable communities in the hardest-to-reach areas in a way that is both cost effective and low-burden for targeted community members. Additionally, although the idea of mobile clinics is not new in Somalia and Somaliland, it is not an approach that is often seen outside of the health sector. The ability of the partnership to leverage both the Manhal Hospital Group's specialized staff and equipment and SOMGEP-T's extensive local ties made it possible for CARE to provide a level of support that is not typically available to/possible for programmes like SOMGEP-T. The partnership also notably leveraged the alignment between the Manhal Hospital Group's goal of providing subsidized medical support to vulnerable community members and SOMGEP-T's goal of addressing the barriers of marginalized girls to attending and transitioning in school.

Each month, technical education working groups are organized by the MoE. Staff from various development organizations and other relevant stakeholders attend these working groups to share best practices and discuss progress toward common goals. These working groups represent a key opportunity for organizations to socialize what they are doing with the MoE, which in one way or another touches all projects that are implemented in the region and therefore is uniquely positioned to carry forward important learnings and replicate best practices across projects. These meetings have been and will continue to be an important forum for sharing the learnings associated with this private-public partnership and exploring ways to improve on the concept in the future.

The Impact of System-Level Gender Mainstreaming in the Somali Girls' Education Promotion Program - Transition

Somali girls face particularly significant and overlapping barriers to gaining an education. Like many girls worldwide, household and domestic responsibilities are placed upon them by their parents, and they live in a crisis-prone environment in which conflict, drought, and other shocks can impact schooling year-to-year. In addition, Somali girls face cultural barriers to education, which promote early marriage and female exclusion from education and the eventual workforce. And the educational systems intended to support them are severely under-resourced and fragile, having been reconstructed relatively recently after decades of civil war. The result is a situation in which gender inequity in education is reinforced by weak incentives for a girl and her family to invest in her education, and in which systemic efforts to address the problem are hampered by a lack of resources.

The GEC/USAID-funded Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T) attempted to reduce barriers to girls' education through a variety of overlapping and reinforcing interventions. Many of the programme's activities targeted teachers and their schools, through the training of teachers and capacity-building with Community Education Committee (CEC) members. Others targeted individual households through the provision of bursaries and the promotion of Village Savings and Loans Associations. Finally, recognising that some impacts require broader interventions, the programme promoted women's representation within the teaching corps and in other educational space, identified and provided a platform for female role models, supported Gender Units within the Ministries of Education in Somaliland, Puntland, and Galmudug, and supported the development of alternative education options targeting out-of-school girls. In this paper, we assess the impact of SOMGEP-T's system-level focus on gender equity. A system-level focus allowed the programme to have wider impact in specific areas than it would have through interventions targeted exclusively to SOMGEP-T communities and schools. Specifically, we study whether the programme's interventions had any broader – i.e. outside of intervention schools – impact on:

- The inclusion of women in the educational sector, especially as teachers and CEC members;
- The training of teachers on gender inclusion and the production and distribution of gender-focused learning materials to schools;
- The use of gender-sensitive teaching methods;
- Girls' perceptions of their teachers and their comfort in the school environment;
- Girls' attendance at and retention in school;

- Girls' self-esteem and the importance they and their caregivers place on education.

Our analysis relies heavily on data collected during SOMGEP-T's four evaluation rounds, which tracked girls in both programme and non-programme schools. The latter group provides critical data that allows us to judge whether the programme's system-level efforts contributed to change outside of SOMGEP-T schools. We supplement this data with three Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with regional gender focal points, who oversaw the mainstreaming of gender at a system and school level for their respective regions.

Female Representation in Educational Spaces

SOMGEP-T sought to increase women's representation as teachers, head teachers, CEC members, and within government educational ministries. The purpose of this effort was manifold: to ensure schools have female staff present who can act as confidantes and mentors for female students; to provide positive female role models whom female students will see on a frequent basis; and to promote gender-sensitivity in teaching and school management through the systematic inclusion of female perspectives.

At least with regard to teachers, the programme seems to have increased women's inclusion in SOMGEP-T schools. From baseline to endline, the number of full-time female teachers increased from 41 to 54 in a set of 36 intervention schools, and women went from making up 16.2 percent of the overall teaching staff in those schools to 19.4 percent. Unfortunately, this small but meaningful improvement was limited to programme schools – in fact, the total number of full-time female teachers declined slightly in comparison (non-programme) schools, and their share of the teaching staff stayed the same. This suggests the programme was somewhat effective at promoting the inclusion of female teachers in schools where they actively worked, but were unable to change – over the timespan available – the systemic factors that reduce female employment as teachers in rural schools. We emphasise this point regarding timespan because some interventions – including the institutionalisation of a gender quota in teacher training colleges – are unlikely to cause major shifts immediately. A longer time horizon may be necessary to detect changes in the gender composition of the teacher corps.³⁴

Beyond the teacher corps, there is suggestive evidence that women are better-represented in other areas of the education sector than in the past. While far from a systematic sample, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) targeting CEC members in SOMGEP-T schools included a higher share of female participants than in previous rounds, suggesting that women have been incorporated into CECs to some degree. Gender Focal Points (GFPs) are also overwhelmingly female, based on KIIs conducted with three GFPs who participated in the programme.³⁵ While the evaluation did not collect systematic data on the gender of head teachers or other school administrators, one GFP reported that their Ministry of Education's Gender Unit promoted the inclusion of women in school management positions:

"The [Gender] Unit seeks women's empowerment, such as advocating for them to be part of the upper-level management at the school level. A large number of girls are assigned these positions of Deputy Head teachers, teachers, and supervisors from the MOE."³⁶

At the same time, there is both evidence that inclusion has not increased much and that significant barriers to female inclusion remain, even in cases where a programme explicitly promotes female inclusion. For instance, one GFP noted that their Gender Unit had trained female teachers on administrative skills with the intention that they would become head teachers, but that they had not

³⁴ It is also important to note that two of the three Gender Focal Points interviewed for this study reported that the number of female teachers in their region increased. The small sample size of schools studied may fail to capture broader, systemwide increases in female representation as teachers.

³⁵ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland; KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland; KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

³⁶ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

actually been given these positions.³⁷ GFPs also indicated that women are still underrepresented on CECs, because the position is viewed as requiring literacy, public speaking skills, and influence that local women either lack or are perceived to lack.³⁸ The idea that some positions require skills that women do not possess is also reflected in one GFP's report regarding female District and Regional Education Officers (DEOs and REOs). As she described it, "there is a continuous discouragement coming from men. They defined the REO post as a conflict resolution post, where only men can do it."³⁹ The same GFP suggested that women face a difficult time becoming head teachers because male teachers object to working for and reporting to a female head teacher.⁴⁰

Promotion of Gender-Sensitive and Inclusive Teaching

SOMGEP-T spent considerable effort encouraging the use of gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching methods. With regard to programme schools, these efforts were centred on training teachers. At a system level, though, the programme sought to promote gender-sensitivity training through educational ministries, who were meant to train teachers on these same teaching practices and encourage their use.

At a fairly basic level, there is relatively little evidence of widespread training on gender-sensitive methods. For instance, at its highest, just 24.3 percent of programme schools had at least one teacher who had received – per their head teachers – training of this kind.⁴¹ This share had declined by the time of the endline and – in non-programme schools – the share of teachers participating in training on gender-sensitive teaching methods is even lower (16.1 percent of schools, at its highest). A small number of head teachers, when asked about new learning and teaching materials their school was using, reported that they had received gender-sensitive materials; however, these materials were apparently provided by CARE and other NGOs, rather than by the MOE. Combined with the fact that gender-focused training has not expanded significantly in comparison schools, a system-level approach that sought to promote a gender focus through educational ministries does not appear to have been effective in this respect.

If teacher training – and other Ministry-driven aspects of gender mainstreaming – has had an impact, two places where we might observe this impact is in teachers' attitudes toward girls' education and in their practices in the classroom, including how those practices are interpreted and reported on by girls themselves. There is mixed evidence that teachers' gender attitudes have improved over time. When teachers were asked whether they hold girls and boys to the same expectations in the classroom, 74.8 percent of them agreed strongly during the endline evaluation. However, this represents a decline since 2019 (Midline #2), when 79.8 percent felt strongly that they hold girls and boys to the same standards. On the other hand, teachers were less likely to believe that "boys and girls are better at different subjects," which indicates an improvement, insofar as teachers are less likely to hold regressive views that boys are better-suited to mathematics or other "difficult" subjects.

These ambiguous findings are also reflected, to a degree, in *how* teachers engage with students in their classrooms. The SOMGEP-T evaluation showed a fairly significant decline in the use of corporal punishment by teachers. This decline was largest in the context of classrooms being actively observed by members of the evaluation team, but it was also seen in the number of girls who reported that their teacher used corporal punishment in the classroom within the previous week. Between 2017 and 2021, the share of girls reporting that their teacher used corporal punishment once or more in the previous week fell from 64.3 percent to 54.0 percent in programme schools. Unfortunately, this decline was not mirrored in comparison schools, where the share actually increased slightly, from 48.3 to 50.7 percent.

³⁷ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

³⁸ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

³⁹ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

⁴⁰ KII with Gender Focal Point, Somaliland.

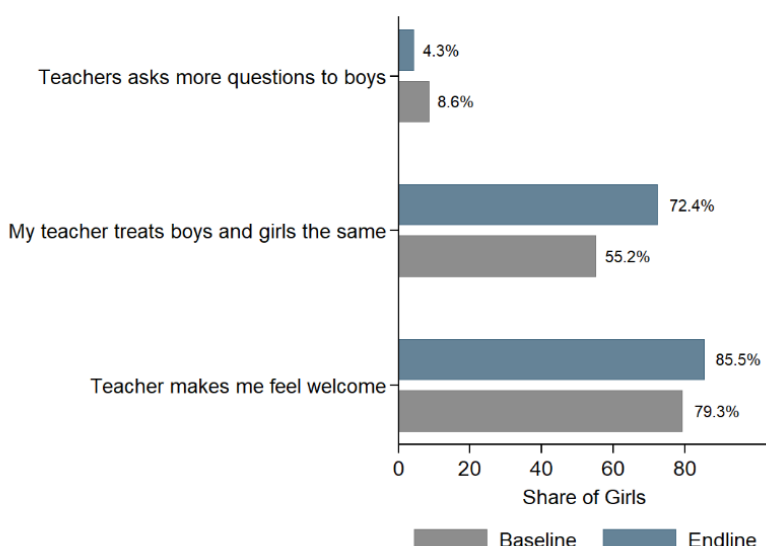
⁴¹ It is important to note that training courses may have focused on inclusive teaching practices more generally, and gender-sensitivity may have been included in courses in such a way that head teachers did not interpret this as their primary focus. As such, this figure may understate the extent of such training in a way, but if gender-sensitivity was not viewed as the primary focus of the training, the training may have been of limited value in increasing gender-sensitivity.

On the other hand, the evaluation recorded minor improvements in the level of girls' inclusion in the classroom, relative to boys. During classroom observations conducted in the endline, girls actually participated slightly more than boys, a reversal of the trend from four years earlier, during the baseline, a finding that was seen in comparison schools as well.

Of course, teacher attitudes and their behaviour during classroom observations are not the only ways in which gender-sensitivity might manifest. Teachers who practice gender-sensitive methods on a consistent basis and have internalised a gender focus are likely to make female students feel more comfortable in class in ways and through practices that might not be readily observable or even readily quantifiable. One approach, then, is to assess whether girls feel more comfortable and whether girls feel they are treated differently from boys.

Figure 3 reports on data collected during SOMGEP-T evaluations, capturing how girls feel their teacher treats them. The findings reported include only comparison girls, who were not exposed to individual- and school-level programme activities. As the figure shows, there have been meaningful improvements in comparison girls' comfort in the school environment since the baseline, which

Figure 3: Changes in how girls perceive their teachers and the classroom environment, among comparison girls



suggests that system-level teacher training efforts may have paid dividends for all students. For instance, the share of comparison girls who strongly agree that their teacher makes them feel welcome in school rose from 79.3 to 85.5 percent over this period, in schools where SOMGEP-T was not actively operating. The share of girls who report that their teachers ask more questions of boys was cut in half from baseline to endline. This represents an important caveat to findings – here and in the evaluation report – that gender-sensitivity in teaching did *not* change appreciably over time, because girls' viewpoints are derived from “day in, day out” interactions with their teachers – girls have rich empirical evidence on which to draw.⁴²

Self-Esteem and the Value of Education

A key pillar of SOMGEP-T's Theory of Change emphasised the importance of girls' self-esteem and life skills – leadership, problem-solving abilities, and self-confidence, among others – in empowering girls to remain enrolled in school and giving them influence over other life decisions. A second pillar of the programme's Theory of Change highlighted the importance of community attitudes toward girls' education and how valuable girls' education is perceived to be. Both these outcomes were targeted at a systemic level through activities designed to empower girls and provide them – and their families – with evidence of the value of education. One such activity gave a platform to professionally successful female role models, demonstrating the opportunities available to educated women and providing a model for girls to emulate. Another activity was the implementation of Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs), which helped girls build a peer support network, and linked them with female mentors locally.

⁴² Taken further, one could argue that girls' perceptions are of greater importance than actual gender-sensitivity in teaching methods. Insofar as the goal is to increase girls' comfort in the classroom – with comfort assumed to improve learning outcomes, willingness to participate in class, attendance, and retention – self-reported comfort is a direct measure of the outcome we wish to affect.

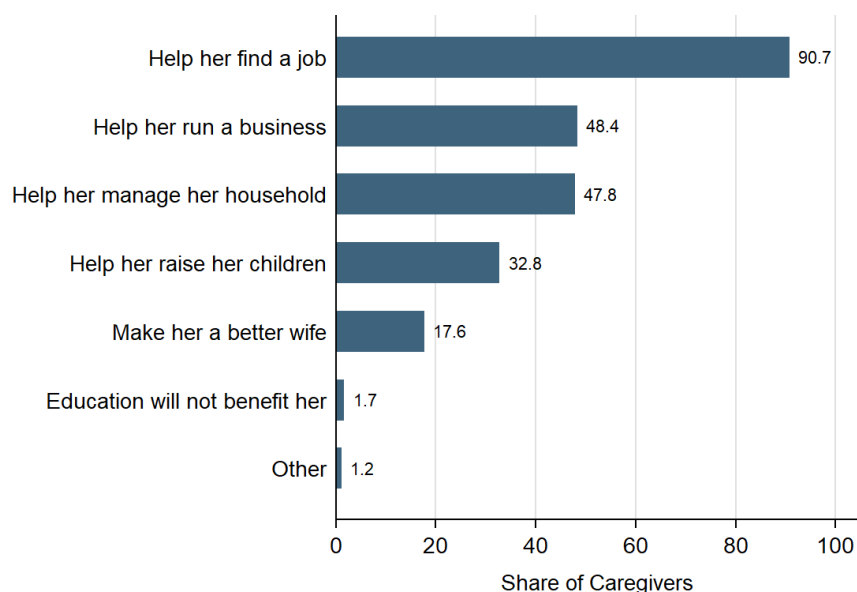
We first consider changes in girls’ self-esteem and life skills, as measured by CARE’s Youth Leadership Index, a measure of self-confidence, decision-making, problem-solving and organisational skills, sense of voice, and ability to motivate others.⁴³ The impact of SOMGEP-T on the life skills of girls in intervention schools has been analysed extensively in the evaluation report; our interest is in whether life skills among *comparison* girls improved over the programme’s lifetime. If they have, a portion of these improvements could be attributable to the system-level activities – described above – promoted by SOMGEP-T.

From 2017 to 2021, among a set of girls tracked over that time period, YLI scores among comparison girls increased in parallel with those in programme schools. YLI scores are calculated on a 0-100 scale, and comparison girls’ scores improved by just 2.5 points over this period. Even this small change is plausibly explained by “growth effects,” as older girls tended to have higher YLI scores at baseline.

In contrast to life skills, the period 2017-2021 witnessed significant changes in the perceived value of girls’ education, among both girls and their caregivers. When girls were asked, at the baseline, whether “going to school is important for what you want to do when you grow up,” 85.8 percent of comparison girls affirmed that school was important for their future plans. This share increased to 93.5 percent at endline, a change which is notable both for its magnitude and for the fact that affirmative responses were not, at baseline, correlated with the age of the girl. This means that the gains observed over time cannot be simply attributed to “growth effects” – it appears the programme increased the value girls see in education.

Girls’ caregivers – their mothers, fathers, aunts, and so forth – also increasingly see the value of girls’ education. For instance, the share of caregivers who strongly agree that “a girl is just as likely to use her education as a boy” increased in programme communities by 14.0 percentage points over the life of the programme (from 69.1 to 83.1 percent). In comparison communities, this change was slightly less dramatic, but the share of caregivers in comparison communities who strongly agreed rose by 12.2 points.

Figure 4: Ways in which education will help a hypothetical girl, according to caregivers



The evaluation of SOMGEP-T dedicated considerable attention to measuring community attitudes toward girls’ education, which resulted in a variety of measures, some presenting hypothetical scenarios to understand how caregivers thought about education under specific circumstances. These measures tend to corroborate the idea that support for girls’ education has increased broadly. For instance, the share of caregivers that strongly agree girls’ education is a worthwhile investment, even when funds are limited, increased by 5.9 points in comparison communities.

One indication that caregivers increasingly value girls’ education comes from the fact that they can identify a number of benefits of schooling. This cuts to the heart of one barrier to girls’ education in

⁴³ See: CARE. 2014. “CARE’s Youth Leadership Index Toolkit.” Available at: <https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CARE-YLI-Toolkit-FINAL-WEB.pdf>.

this context: if women rarely participate in the labour market, society may undervalue girls' education. Figure 2 demonstrates two promising findings, however. First, the vast majority of caregivers believe education will help a hypothetical girl find a job, which suggests that women are expected to be more active participants in the labour market than we might otherwise have thought.⁴⁴ Second, caregivers see value in education beyond strictly economic – getting a job or running a business – outcomes. Education can make a woman a better mother and help her effectively manage the household; this is important, because these outcomes are valued even by those in Somali society who may oppose women's participation in the labour market or prefer a spouse who does not work or run a business. Even among this subset of the population, respondents see tangible benefits of educating girls.

Attendance, Enrolment, and Retention

Several of the activities described in this paper – the promotion of female role models and gender-sensitive teaching, among others – should enhance girls' interest in participating and remaining in school. A positive classroom environment, for instance, should make girls more interested in attending school and encourage them to continue their schooling.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence of systemwide improvements in attendance or retention of girls who were already enrolled in school. For example, girls' attendance rates fell by 3.0 percentage points from baseline to endline, a trend that affected intervention and comparison schools equally. This decline cannot be attributed to the fact that girls aged over the life of the evaluation, because it was observed even when comparing attendance rates in Grade 1-3 classes across years, controlling explicitly for "age effects." And, while COVID-19 has almost certainly affected attendance rates, there was already a visible decline in 2019, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. Retention of girls in school also declined over time, though this was most pronounced between 2019 and 2021, when COVID-19 undoubtedly impacted retention rates. Between 2017 and 2019, retention rates remained steady in comparison schools, which should be seen as a positive outcome, given that girls' enrolment tends to fall sharply with age.

Where the programme appears to have had a very important systemwide impact is in bringing out-of-school girls back into school. SOMGEP-T directly supported these efforts in communities where it was implemented, engaging in outreach and awareness-raising and providing bursary support in some cases. But SOMGEP-T also promoted a focus on marginalised and out-of-school at a system level by working with ministries of education to implement non-formal education and placing attention on the large number of out-of-school girls. This appears to have paid dividends – not only did transition rates among out-of-school girls (those who were not enrolled in school at baseline) increase dramatically among intervention girls, it also increased among comparison girls. Among comparison girls who were out-of-school in 2019, 26.1 percent had re-entered education of some kind, either in formal school or an alternative education programme.

Conclusion

The direct impacts of SOMGEP-T activities have been studied extensively through external evaluations and a series of more specific learning exercises. What has received less attention is the impact SOMGEP-T may have had on systemwide educational outcomes. Part of the explanation for this neglect is rooted in the difficulty of assessing the impact of system-level interventions, such as supporting the development of MOE Gender Units; system-level interventions, by definition, affect all schools, and distinguishing between their effects and broader trends that would have occurred in their absence is very difficult.

Nonetheless, the rich data collected from comparison schools during SOMGEP-T provides an opportunity to, at least tentatively, link the programme's incorporation of gender considerations at

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the hypothetical scenario in question randomly varied whether the girl in question was portrayed as an excellent or a struggling student. Even when the girl was presented as a student who struggled in upper primary school, caregivers believe schooling will improve her economic outcomes later in life.

the system level to broader changes observed between 2017 and 2021. This analysis suggests that the programme has contributed to four major shifts beyond the bounds of programme schools: a decline in the perceived acceptability and use of corporal punishment; improvement in how girls experience the classroom and school environment, with girls feeling more comfortable and like they are treated more equally than in the past; re-enrolment of the large number of girls who were previously out-of-school; and an increased sense, among both girls and caregivers, that girls' education is simply worthwhile.

Other system-level impacts did not materialise. For instance, there is no evidence that the programme successfully improved girls' attendance or retention rates, despite gains in the perceived value of girls' education. And, while the programme made efforts to increase the representation of women in the educational sector – as teachers, head teachers, and so forth – these efforts were often stymied by resistance from men and other barriers. We see good reason to expect these efforts to yield benefits in the longer-term, but they have been slow and small in scale thus far. This expectation likely applies to other system-level efforts – changes at this scale tend to be slow, especially when they are reactions to less-direct and more diffuse interventions. This does not change the importance of efforts to make systemic changes, as the gains from such efforts – even if they occur only in the long-run – are particularly impactful, benefitting tens of thousands of girls per year.



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