



# CHANGE

Improving Access to Education  
to Most Marginalised Girls in Ethiopia,  
People In Need (PIN) Ethiopia

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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## Final reflections – Learnings

### What did the project do?

Between 2018 and 2023 the CHANGE project was implemented under the Girls' Education Challenge in four regions across Ethiopia (Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR and Afar) to improve the life chances of 24,968 out-of-school girls. The consortium led by People in Need (PIN) Ethiopia implemented the project with partners including Concern Worldwide, Welthungerhilfe, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and Amref Health Africa.

The project focused on improving learning outcomes and life skills for highly marginalised girls, increasing transition rates at key points in their pathway, and improving community and government support, acceptance, and commitment to sustain girls' education.

The project implemented the following activities:

- enrolled 24,968 out-of-school and highly marginalised girls in alternative basic education (10,646) and integrated functional adult literacy (14,322) programmes
- Provided short-term technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to facilitate the transition to employment opportunities and income-generating activities for 1,800 girls.
- Trained 577 teachers and facilitators in gender-responsive pedagogy, multi-level/grade, child-centred and inclusive teaching methods.
- Established 565 self-help groups (SHGs) to provide 10,098 girls with life skills, psychosocial care, training on how to develop entrepreneurship and business plans and connecting with credit institutions and cooperatives.
- Provided safe and inclusive infrastructure facilities for accelerated learning programmes including construction of latrines for girls, water system for clean and drinking water, learning supplies and sanitary pads.
- Working with communities (parents/caregivers) through 223 structured community action groups (CAGs) to drive positive attitudinal change towards girls' education and their progression in life.
- Provided direct cash support to 4,776 girls and provided seed funding for SHGs.
- Provided sanitary kits and school feeding, particularly during emergencies, such as drought and floods.
- Provided targeted support to 430 girls with disabilities through provision of education, medical support and assistive devices

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**24,968** out-of school highly marginalised girls rolled in

**14,322** integrated functional adult literacy IFAL (15–18 years)

**10,646** alternative basic education ABE (9–14 years)

**10,098** girls transited to SHG

**1,800** girls transited to TVET

**8,343** girls transited to primary school

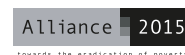
Ethiopia has made significant progress in girls' education, with a rapid expansion in primary school enrolment. During 2021/22, female primary school students had an enrolment rate of 85% for girls and 92.3% for boys. Educational inequity, particularly in remote rural areas, remains a pressing concern due to cultural, social, and economic barriers, and high dropout rates even after enrolment.

Rural regions in Ethiopia, particularly Afar and Somali, have the highest proportion of out-of-school children, posing a significant challenge to the country's education system. Rural girls do not have the support from home to pursue education and are prioritised for household chores. There is lack of school facilities in reasonable walking distance, lack of latrines, and water are not available in most schools. In pastoral regions, a high proportion of girls need to walk for over an hour to nearby primary schools due to their pastoralist community. There are heightened safeguarding concerns on the way to and back from school, such as kidnappings and forced marriages due to long school commutes as well. Unsatisfactory hygiene conditions constitute a major barrier in regular school attendance. In addition, adolescent girls face several challenges relating to menstruation and its proper management. Families living in severe poverty are unable to afford both direct and indirect costs of schooling.

*I personally believe what we have learned is very nice. We learned how to subtract and add numbers. We were not aware of this when we were staying at home. So, we learned a lot after enrolling in ABE.*

Girl

Girls' Education Challenge





## What did the project learn?

**Adapting to regional contexts.** In such a geographically vast and ethnically diverse country like Ethiopia the differences among regions and even within regions (zones) are inevitable. Although the activities are supposed to be the same for all four regions/ partners, a standardised approach to girls' education in all areas could not be applied. On the contrary, it was important to ensure that each region would develop their own tailored approach. In response to these differences each partner had to develop regionally specific curricula reflecting cultural context and respecting local language.

**Responding to emergencies.** Despite the original design of project as educational development project, the implementation took place in environment of constant humanitarian crises: COVID-19, conflicts with displacements, natural disasters, political unrests which occurred in different times and different areas throughout the whole project. The crucial learning from the emergency situations was that timely and continuous follow-up was essential especially in rural areas. The readiness to adjust and continue providing classes to girls despite COVID-19, droughts or conflicts was a major factor which minimised dropouts. It also meant that the overall approach of the development project had to adapt to respond to the humanitarian challenges. Key project adaptations include reaching girls through home-based learning during Covid 19, introduction of mobile schools for girls displaced by conflicts or natural disasters, provision of school feeding, scholastic materials or humanitarian cash support assistance to girls and families who's economic situation deteriorated due to the conflict and disasters.

Unplanned responses and adjustments during projects were the most difficult challenges the project faced. However, a key learning was that in countries facing long-term instability, it is crucial to prepare flexible contingency plan and budget anticipating external events which might affect the project implementation and impact project outcomes.

**Working closely with local communities.** Working with communities as drivers of change rather than recipients of change improves results and enhances success and sustainability. Community action groups (CAGs) played a vital role in identifying highly marginalised girls, in reducing girls' absenteeism from school and in ensuring the learning environments were inclusive and safe. They also played an invaluable role in mobilising the local community and advocating for the importance of girls' education through community campaigns. Members were from a range of community structured, including religious leaders, and headteachers. Facilitators were also selected from the local communities as they were more committed and could better contribute to protecting and supporting marginalised girls in their communities. As they were gaining experiences supported also by the project team, CAGs became key active agents of positive and sustainable change, providing community-level support and were confident in voicing girls agenda. They contributed to strengthening of referral mechanism and its integration into the government system.

*The courses, housekeeping and hygiene management, the benefits of saving, home gardening, bee keeping and poultry production are among major skill we developed.*

*Girl*

According to Unique tool data, facilitators reported **5,021** cases of out of school girls to CAGs. Out of the total number of girls handed to CAGs, **61%** (and in case of SNNPR it was **71%**) were successfully brought back to school thanks to CAGs' interventions.

#### Reducing dropouts and increasing transition.

Transition of girls from informal to formal education depends on many external factors such as the availability of formal schools near their homes, the quality of the schools, employment opportunities in their locality. The project noted that after completion of the integrated functional adult learning programme girls were more interested in setting up and/or joining self-help groups than transitioning to TVET schools. Some reasons for this were the low wage-employment/self-employment opportunities, lack of sufficient start-up capital/tools, low salaries in employment sector and most TVET schools were in extremely remote areas. Self-Help Groups gave girls the opportunity to create their own income and get support from other women on developing a business plan. It was also noted that if these groups were established while girls were still engaged in the learning programme, they would have more time to set them up and drop-outs could be reduced. This is attributed to girls being able to see a practical prospect to building their businesses after completing the integrated functional adult learning programme.

*In the past girls did not have access to education, girls worked only in the kitchen but now girls can learn and get employed and have their own salary. Therefore, now we are learning and able to know a lot of things. Girls used to get married early in previous times but now we are allowed to get an education and gain knowledge. When we were staying at home, we were not able to write our names, or list the day of the week, or months of the year. But after entering the school we know everything, and I am also trying to learn to sign my own signature.*

Girl

**8,343 9–14 year old girls transited to primary school**

**1800 15–18 year old girls transited to TVETs**

**10 098 girls transited to Self Help Groups; 84% of SHG members (90% for members doing IGA) demonstrate self-confidence in their economic decision-making, which is a significant increase from 30% in BL**

**Engaging the government to ensure sustainability.** Close relations and partnership with government bodies was essential for endorsement of any adaptations and for sustainability of the interventions. Community actions groups was one such intervention that proved to be impactful, with the most potential to be sustained. The groups built on existing community structures – which was a critical success factor as a sustainable model with high community acceptance allowing accurate targeting and space for social change. To ensure sustainability and continuation of these community actions groups the project implemented community conversation trainings and conducted events with groups leaders to share experiences creating linkages with government institutions. The project started a dialogue with the government around sustainability, raising awareness of the importance of educating girls and the success in preventing girls' absenteeism from school. The government also understood the value of having community facilitators after persistent efforts by the project who worked with gov-

ernment institutions to find ways to integrate project facilitators into the larger education system. This involved discussions around how to best utilise facilitators in communities with no formal schools.

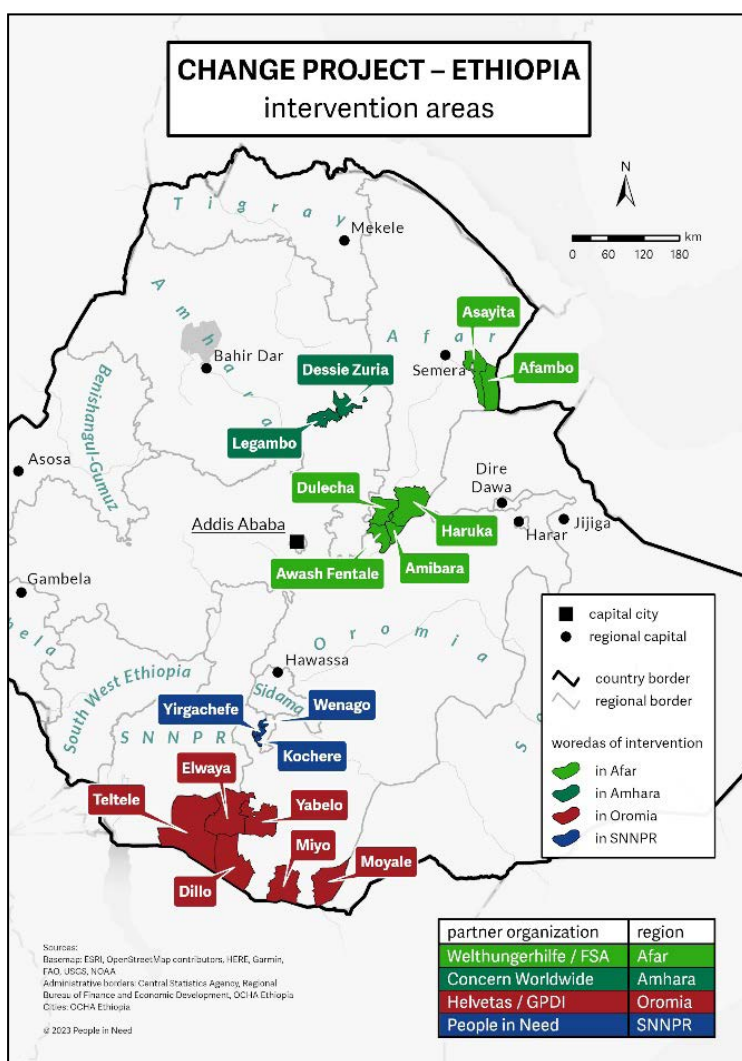
**577 trained teachers who will remain in the formal system**

**129 newly constructed learning centers handed over to the government adjusted validated curricula to the local context and introduced Continuous professional development (CPD) in ABE/IFAL programs**

**Bringing evidence by developing and deploying the Unique Tool:** The Unique Tool was created using Microsoft Power BI in response to the project’s need for a centralised user-friendly tool for data collection to keep track of indicators with unified methodology across the consortium. During the project’s lifetime, 4,404 monitoring visits were conducted with the support of the Unique Tool. The tool offers analyses of major project data and helps easily identify gaps and strength. The up-to-date

insight from field visits as well as the ability to see both the bigger picture and the smallest details contributed to the decision-making capacity and project management.

The tool comprises of eight different sections that are aligned with the key components of the project. The eight sections can be completed either all or selectively during a single monitoring visit, depending on the number of activities that are being monitored by the user. Each of the eight sections requires the users to record their GPS location and take photographs of specific activities. This set up has a triple advantage: remote monitoring mechanism, generation of means of verification as well as transfer of detailed information on the ground (e.g. photos of SHG or CAG meeting minutes) all the way to the project and programme management staff across the consortium.



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