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Girls' Agency & Social Cohesion

The Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) project worked to **improve learning outcomes and positive transitions for 90,698 extremely vulnerable girls and female youth in South Somalia**. AGES research showed that vulnerable girls' limited self-confidence and voice hinders participation in class, with a negative impact on learning, particularly among girls with disabilities and displaced youth. To address this barrier, AGES formed school-based clubs known as **Girls' Empowerment Forum (GEF)**. Through the GEF, vulnerable students participate in activities to develop leadership skills with support from mentors and are linked to resource persons within the community. They are trained to act as peer mentors within their schools and community, reaching out to other girls to provide support, and engaging in joint advocacy and action. GEF participants work together to develop plans to address issues of their choice through girl-led action. GEF mentors and peer mentors are also trained on psychosocial first aid, providing support to those affected by shocks. In 2020-2024, AGES established 911 Girls' Empowerment Forums with a total of 9,110 members. The GEFs were connected through 18 district-level networks.

The impact



Increase in learning outcomes and transition

Among non-formal education (NFE) students assessed immediately after course conclusion, **participating in a GEF was associated with an average increase of 15.4 percentage points on literacy and 16.1 percentage points on numeracy.**

For NFE students assessed over six months after conclusion, having participated in a GEF still increased learning outcomes by 9 percentage points.

Three years after the intervention, a history of participation in a GEF predicted an increase of 11 percentage points in positive transitions for girls.



Girl-led social changes

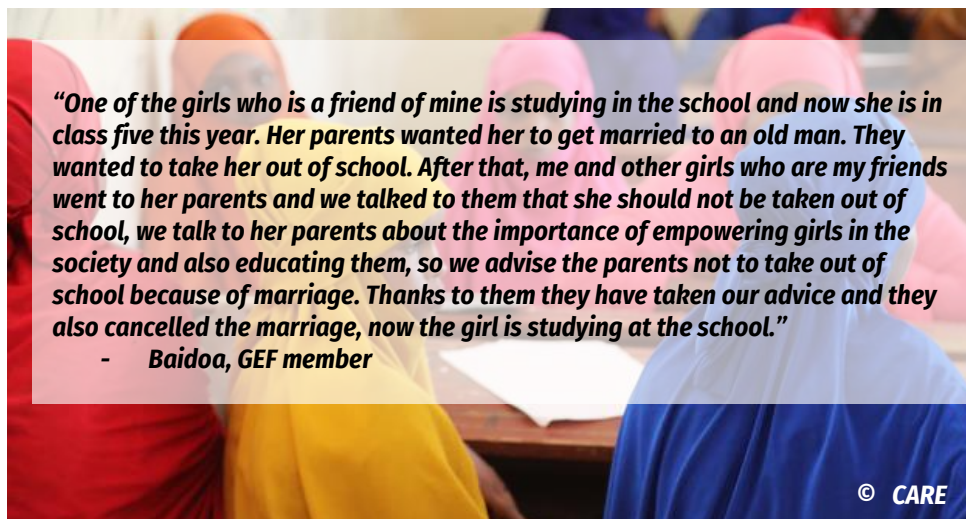
Girls have encouraged others to attend school; followed up on cases of absenteeism and early marriage; negotiate for support to education at home; and sought to address discrimination against girls with disabilities, minority girls, and displaced students, among other actions. Overall, 27% of the girls participating in youth networks have engaged in activities to prevent early marriage.



Improved self-confidence & social cohesion

Vulnerable girls reported that a key benefit of participating in AGES was developing the sense of being *part of a community* and the ability to meet people outside their household or social circle.

GEF participants have described instances of working collaboratively with others to address common issues, including early marriage, dropout, disseminating information about non-formal education opportunities, and forming study groups to support those who are struggling to learn. GEF members' exposure to different activities are



contributing to shift perceptions of their role at home and community. Girls have developed new perspectives and regard themselves as role models who can teach and inspire other girls.

Girls and their parents explained how attending school, participating in GEFs, and engaging in community activities have enabled girls to speak out at home, during class, and collectively with peers. Girls feel more confident to share concerns with parents about teacher behavior. They were able to negotiate with their families to obtain money for school fees and other needs. Vulnerable girls – particularly those with disabilities and from minority groups – stated that they have gained self-confidence to overcome their fear of participating in class.

Way forward

The results indicate that the Girls' Empowerment Forum has been particularly successful in developing girls' agency and shifting gender norms about girls' roles. The positive results suggest that an expansion of the GEF model would maximize the impact seen to date, particularly if amplifying the outreach actions already being conducted by existing groups.



The Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) project is an ambitious six-year initiative (2018-2024) funded by FCDO and USAID, which seeks to enable ultra-marginalised girls and female youth living in conflict-affected areas of Somalia to access quality education responsive to their needs. AGES combines the provision of three education modalities with financial literacy, youth savings groups, life skills, mentorship, and girl-led civic action. AGES enrolled a total of 90,968 girls in education, including 21,945 in primary education, 1,244 in formal special needs schools, 13,276 in accelerated basic education (ABE), and 54,233 in non-formal education classes (NFE).

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