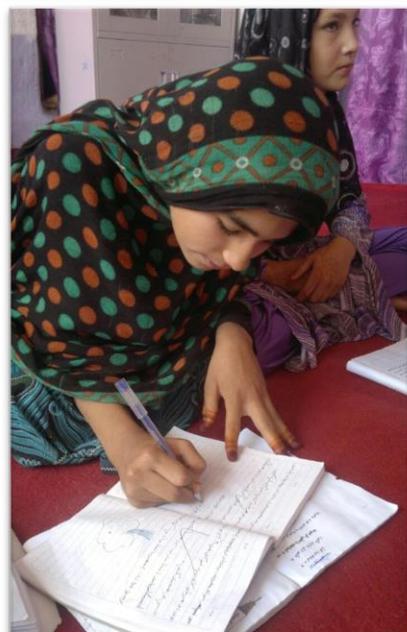


Girls' Education Challenge

Case studies

June 2016



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Names have been changed to protect identities

1. Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Afghanistan

The end of a mother's worries: Anita's story (mother)

Anita is from a very traditional family in Ghazni. Anita is illiterate, but she believes that education is important, even if her husband doesn't. The difference of opinions between them about education sometimes causes problems; she wants her children to be educated, but he is completely opposed to it. Anita has an 8 year old daughter, but she couldn't convince her husband to let her daughter go to the government school, which is far away from the village.

Anita asked her relatives for support but no one helped her. She was very disappointed and couldn't see any way to educate her daughter and wondered how the people around her didn't understand that it was her daughter's right. "I was afraid that my children would inherit my fate." Anita prayed to God that somehow her children would have a different life than hers.

In August 2013, CARE established a CBE class in her village and Anita knew that her dreams had come true. The class is close to their home and the teacher is a woman, so Anita's husband let her daughter enrol. Now she's the best student in her second grade class. She even helps her brothers to study. "My dreams have come true and it makes me so happy when she goes to school!"

From borrower to earner: Fatima's story (teacher)

Fatima is 23 and completed tenth grade. She's married and has a 9 year old son. Her husband is unemployed and the family doesn't have any income. Her husband had borrowed money so that he could feed the family, but he couldn't pay the money back, which was very stressful for the whole family. Fatima's husband had decided to go work in another country so that he could repay the money, but Fatima was worried and didn't want him to go.

At that same time, CARE advertised a position for a literacy teacher for women. Fatima decided to apply, but was worried that she wouldn't meet the requirements. After applying, Fatima was shortlisted and asked to take a written test. She wasn't sure if she could pass the test or not, but a few days later was invited to an interview. She did well in the interview and was selected as the literacy teacher for her community. "I couldn't believe that I was chosen as a teacher, because I'd seen so much corruption in some organisations," she says.

Now Fatima can help her family and her husband is still with the family. She has repaid some of her husband's loans with her salary and now has a happy life. She expresses her appreciation to CARE and the honest way that they recruited her, because now she is a teacher and can provide for her family's needs.

Excited and hopeful for a brighter future: Mustafa's story (boy)

Mustafa is 8 years old and like many other children born in remote villages in Ghor, Mustafa wasn't able to enrol in school at the government mandated age of seven. There are no schools in his community and the nearest government school is 10 kilometres away – too far for Mustafa to walk safely.

Afghanistan has lost a lot during three decades of war, and the education sector has sustained some of the worst damage. Many schools were destroyed during the war and a whole generation was left without access to education. Mustafa's village is in the mountains and the valleys flood when the snow melts. There are many communities like Mustafa's, and like Mustafa, thousands of children can't go to school because it is just too far.

Mustafa, who lost his mother when he was a year old, lives with his aunt's family because his father works as a day labourer in another village. Because his parents cannot take him to school and because his village is so remote Mustafa didn't have the opportunity to attend school until CRS opened a class Mustafa's village under the STAGES project. Even though he began school a year late, Mustafa was able to begin first grade and has since finished second grade!

Mustafa is thrilled by the opportunity to go to school. He says, "I felt so bad when children from my village went to school but I couldn't. I always wanted to be able to read and write." He wishes his father had also studied. "If my father had an education, he would have a good job now. He didn't go to school, so now he has to work for other people and I don't see him very often. I don't want to be illiterate. I want to continue my education."

Mustafa is optimistic about his future and wants to be an educated man. He likes his teacher and he is happy that he has school materials from CRS: "I love the school bag and the pens and notebooks that CRS has given me very much. My father is poor and he cannot afford to buy pens and note books."

Mustafa expressed his gratitude to CRS for establishing a community school in his village. "I would like to thank CRS for delivering these services and establishing such a nice class in our village. I also want to thank them for giving us such a nice teacher. Every day, I come to the class and read and write with other kids - I feel so good!"

Teacher learning circle in the community

In 2013, AKF established seven community-based primary classes in three villages in Baghlan. One of the activities that AKF implemented in this area to support newly trained teachers was a teacher learning circle (TLC). The TLC was hosted at a government schools and helped teachers discuss what they were learning in their training and learn from each other. The TLC included government school teachers, but community-based teachers were also invited. This gave all the teachers the opportunity to develop their teaching skills by sharing achievements, challenges and strategies with the more experienced and qualified government school staff. The teachers, both male and female, take turn coordinating meetings, which are usually held once or twice a month depending on teacher availability.

During a TLC meeting, one of the community-based teachers commented that she was having difficulty understanding a group of academic Dari words she had found in a book checked out of the community library. She asked one of the government teachers to help. The government teacher explained the meaning of a list of 30 words until the community-based teacher could understand all of them.

Teachers also discussed concerns about parents' capacity to support children's education at home, because many parents are illiterate and struggle to help children with homework assignments or projects. As part of the meeting, the participants identified solutions to increase parents' involvement in their children's learning: inviting parents and shuras to attend teacher learning circle meetings to understand teachers' concerns; having regular conversations with parents and the community about their role in supporting children's education; building closer ties with families and building their awareness of the importance of education. The group then invited shura members to the next teaching learning circle meeting.

Teacher Learning Circles create the opportunity for teachers to share and solve problems, discuss techniques and ask each other for help. They also build supportive connections between teachers of all kinds working in the same area and give teachers the opportunity to continue and personalise their professional development beyond standardised training.

Community investment in Bamyan

Access to water is a common problem for rural communities in Bamyan. When AKF established a community-based class in this area, they realised that while the community was willing to provide learning spaces, they had difficulty providing water for the children. When AKF carried out a needs assessment in one of their focus communities, they found that there wasn't drinking or hand-washing water near the class for students to use and decided to provide an infrastructure development grant to the community to build a water source.

Construction began in September and community members supported excavation and construction of a water source near the class. Over 70 community members volunteered their time to help dig a 350 meter trench for water pipes to bring water to the source. The community also contributed almost £300 pounds worth of cement, pipes and stone for construction. The project was completed in November and now it provides the CBE students with easy access to drinking and hand-washing water.

Girls learning how to teach in Afghanistan

In 2014, as part of STAGES program, Save the Children and AKF piloted the project's apprenticeship training program, called Girls Learning How to Teach (GLTTA). The GLTTA training addresses one of the main barriers to girls' education in Afghanistan: the lack of female teachers, especially in remote rural areas. This often leads parents to withdraw their daughters from school when they reach the age of puberty.

During 24 weeks, 80 highly motivated young women enrolled in upper secondary school received training on topics such as child development, lesson planning and how to teach children reading and math so that they are prepared to become lower primary school teachers. The success of the program lies in the combination of learning and practice.

Trainees observe classes, complete practical assignments and complete practice teaching in the schools they attend to help lock in what they've learned and give them the experience of teaching.

Participating teachers enjoyed the experience of working with the GLTTA trainees and report that in addition to mentoring trainees, they also learned from them. One teacher acknowledged that she changed her behaviour as she learned about the newest teaching methods: "Trainees assist us in teaching and managing the class in a positive way. We learn some teaching activities and we learn how to do them right from these trainees."

The programme involved provincial education staff, secondary school directors and teachers to maximise official recognition of the training and graduates. The programme was also discussed with the Director of the Teacher Education Department and results from the first cohort will be shared with that department. At the end of the programme, participating girls receive a certificate from Save the Children or AKF and are then eligible to become a teacher for the Ministry of Education, in a community-based class or to apply to a teacher training centre for government teacher training.

Save the Children and AKF have finished training their cohorts of girls and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants report: "GLTTA was a good opportunity to learn a skill which we can use after leaving school. We learned a lot about modern methods of teaching and the thing we enjoyed most was working together." Most of the girls expressed an interest in becoming teachers after the training. Parents were also very satisfied, with one describing the training as "A great opportunity for girls to improve. They are kind and more helpful with smaller siblings."

Compared with school programme, this course is more useful as they practice in their personal life and the things which they learned from the course.” Attendance and pre- and post-test results also demonstrate that GLTTA has been a success.

Save the Children and AKF staff have reflected on the training to identify improvements and strategies to refine the training and are now preparing for the next cohort of girls.



Pesh Deh commits to girls' education

Pesh Deh is a remote village, where most inhabitants, especially women, are illiterate. The nearest government school is far from the village and the people of the village, who are generally conservative, had never allowed their daughters to attend the government school.

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) worked with the District Education Department and community members to establish a community-based primary class in the village.



The community donated space for the classes and AKF provided materials to transform the space into a classroom, learning materials for the students and training for the teacher and the school management committee. The community identified a teacher - a member of the community. Because this person was known to them, they were comfortable sending their daughters to class.

Samey, the Pesh Deh teacher said, *“I foresee a good future for my students because I am completely committed to teaching them. They have responded by attending class every day and doing all their homework. I think they’ve also learned to respect community elders and be kind, polite and honest with each other. Parents and community elders are happy with children’s attitudes at home and in the community.”*

Guncha and Parima, students in Pesh Deh class, said, *“We are very happy with the classes because we learn to read but we also learn so many other good things in class. We want to continue our education and we want to be good teachers in the future to teach other girls in our village.”*

Mohammad Ehsan and Mohammad Sidiq, the director and deputy director of the school management committee observe the class regularly. *“We are very happy that our daughters are getting an education. After establishing the class and donating a classroom space, people in our community were interested in supporting the class by sending their children, especially daughters. Now we’re working with government officials to try and establish a girls’ school close to our village because we’ve seen that education is useful for the future of our children and the development of the village.”*

Able to serve the community

Shabir lives in a remote community in Parwan. He was disabled in an accident when he was young and he uses a walker to get around his village. In spite of his limited mobility, Shabir was able to graduate from high school and is very enthusiastic about the benefits of education.

Shabir looked for job opportunities after he graduated so that he could support his family. He applied for positions in health clinics and government schools, but he wasn't accepted there. Shabir thinks that because he is disabled employers might have thought he would not be able to walk long distances and or meet job requirements.

In late 2013, CARE established a lower secondary community-based class for girls in Shabir's community. The class meets in Shabir's house. *"I am delighted to support children's education in my community and donating a room was what I am able to do"*, he says.

After the village established the school management committee, community members and committee members recommended that Shabir be chosen as the teacher for the class because he had finished high school. He's been working as the teacher for two years now. There is no doubt that Shabir is a dedicated teacher. He arrives in class on time and well prepared with audio visual materials that he prepares himself. He often seeks advice from other teachers and project teacher trainers on how to improve his own teaching. As the result of his hard work and commitment, he has won the respect of his students, community members and other teachers.

Shabir is serving his community as a teacher, but he's benefitting too - the salary Shabir receives has helped him overcome financial problems and support his family. Shabir is grateful to CARE for reaching those in need. *"It's incredible that I can teach and improve my family's economic conditions."*

The best student in the class

No one in Sohila's family had ever been to school and Sohila says, *"My parents didn't let me enrol in school because I am a girl."*

Sohila was so keen to attend class that when she could, she would follow the girls in her village and attend school in secret. She kept asking her parents to let her go to school, asking for permission when she could see they were in a good mood. However, Sohila's father was adamant that girls do not need to go to school and that her enrolment would cause her and the family shame. The distance to the nearest school was an important concern and her parents were worried about her safety.

Things changed when the STAGES project started classes in Sohila's community. Sohila's father became a school management committee member. He was reassured that community-based classes would be established close to students' homes so girls could access them safely.

Sohila's father shared what he had learnt about the classes with his wife, explaining that older girls who had never attended school could attend accelerated learning classes where they study two grades in one calendar year and that the girls would be well looked after in a class near home. Sohila's mother was satisfied and took Sohila to enrol in class.

Sohila has made rapid progress. She says, *"Now I am studying in Grade 3 and I can read, write and draw. I learned about Islam too. Because education is important for me, after a year of school I was in first position in the class. I feel really proud of all the things I have learned in class and I am really happy. My family and the other people in the community are very grateful to Save the Children and we really appreciate their work, especially helping girls like me who were uneducated to attend school."*

A 'Girls Learning to Teach Afghanistan' girl

"Now I am a teacher in a high school in Kabul and teaching first grade students. It's an honour for my family and me. I fulfilled my family's dreams and mine."

There are few female teachers in Afghanistan, and the lack of female teachers is an important barrier to the enrolment of girls, especially in conservative areas where parents may be uncomfortable having their daughters in contact with a male teacher. Because few girls finish high school, they aren't eligible to study at government teacher training colleges - which means that it's difficult to increase the number of female teachers.



STAGES project partners Save the Children and the Aga Khan Foundation developed the GLTTA (Girls Learning to Teach Afghanistan) programme to prepare young women to enter the teaching profession. This is an important step in making it more comfortable for communities to enrol girls in school and learn what they need to know to succeed.

Shamila, a GLTTA graduate, talks about her experience. *"I studied at a government school until Grade 12. My father and mother are illiterate but they believed in the benefits of being able to read and write. They supported me during school and encouraged me to be a useful person during my life for my community and my country."*

"The first time I heard about GLTTA training I had a lot of questions. I wanted to know how long the training would last and if it would really help me become a teacher. I shared information about GLTTA with my family and they allowed me to enrol, and now I've graduated. I thought GLTTA was valuable and effective for girls and women who want to be professional teachers in the future. I learned how to teach and write lesson plans. I learned about children's rights and how to teach children too."

Shamila liked being able to practice what she was learning in the training. *"Each week we had to teach a lesson in a government school so that we could practice what we had learned in front of students."*

Shamila reports that she is more confident because of this opportunity to practice new skills in a real life classroom. *"Now I am a teacher in a school and teaching first grade students. It's an honour for my family and me. I fulfilled my family's dreams and mine. Before starting the GLTTA programme, I didn't know what makes a good and effective teacher and how to teach students. I didn't know how to teach and I wondered if I could be a teacher at all. These were all the questions that were in my mind. Now I know how to teach and which approach is good for students. I'm a good teacher because I participated in GLTTA training."*

Shamila is an advocate for girls' education and encourages parents in her community to send their girls to school. Every month she invites parents to her class and says, *"I encourage parents to let their girls come to school and talk about the value of education and knowledge. I ask them to remove the barriers that stand in front of girls in Afghanistan. My wish is that in Afghanistan we are all literate in the future, especially girls."*

The STAGES project has trained 265 young women like Shamila to become teachers in government schools and community-based classes in their home communities. The GLTTA graduates make it more comfortable for communities to support education for girls and stand as powerful example of the benefits of education for women.

A strong shura paves the way to success: Dahan-e-Tagaghal

Dahan-e-Tagaghal is 7 kilometres from the nearest government school. Because the village is so far from the government school, parents could not send children to school, and were especially reluctant to let girls attend school.

The STAGES project provided a unique opportunity for children of Dahan-e-Tagaghal to access primary education. CRS established a community-based primary school, but also offered accelerated learning classes for older girls who hadn't been able to attend school.



Accelerated learning classes let girls study two grades in a calendar year, and allow them to catch up with other students their age. The accelerated learning class has 30 female students who have just finished Grade 4.

Establishing community-based primary and accelerated learning classes in a village where girls have been discouraged from attending school has been a challenge. In the beginning, CRS staff focused on mobilising the community to raise their awareness about the importance of education in Islam. An important part of this process was recruiting community leaders to participate in the school management committee, which was then trained with the knowledge and skills they needed to champion education in their community.

School management committee members play a critical role in the success of community-based education. They are responsible for identifying a place where classes can be held – one with enough space and light, access to clean drinking water and sanitation and hygiene facilities. Because communities are expected to provide these learning spaces, school management committee members must persuade families to donate a room for the life of the project. The management committee must also identify a qualified teacher that will be accepted by the community and monitor classes and attendance.

The school management committee in Dahan-e-Tagaghal has excelled at all these tasks. Committee members visit community primary and accelerated learning classes each week to observe teaching and provide feedback for teachers. They also meet with the parents of absent students and encourage them to prioritise school attendance. This has contributed to high attendance rates in the community. They conduct meetings with the parents of girls participating in accelerated learning classes to convince them support their daughters' attendance.

Due to the excellent work of this management committee, the Dahan-e-Tagaghal classes are very active and it's clear that students' math and language skills are improving quickly.

The Dahan-e-Tagaghal management committee is also helping other committees. CRS has arranged for other committees to visit Dahan-e-Tagaghal and learn from their experience.

The Dahan-e-Tagahal school management committee members say that they work hard to support education because, “...this class is in our own village and our daughters don’t have to walk long distances – that’s why we’re so committed. Accelerated learning projects are the only way for the girls to continue education and then have a chance to enrol in Grade 7 at a government school. And the students are very active and enthusiastic about learning and education. That’s why we’re so motivated and support the girls so that they can finish primary school.”

Books on wheels

Save the Children has established 21 mobile libraries to provide library access to students and community members in Faryab. For both parents and children, the opportunity to borrow books represents an important way to build literacy skills and create a culture of reading.

The mobile libraries are weatherproof metal boxes with wheels that can easily be moved from community to community. Each mobile library includes some fifty books; storybooks, dictionaries and books on religion.



The libraries are the responsibility of trained volunteer librarians who are responsible for orienting users to books, keeping a register of users and taking the mobile libraries to communities.



One library user talks about her experience: “One day I went out to bring water from the pump and I saw a group of girls walking towards a nearby house, chatting and smiling. They were so happy that I thought they were going to a wedding. I asked them what was so exciting and I was surprised to hear about the mobile library in our community so children can read books and study.”

“I went home and asked my mother for permission to join the girls and meet the librarian and borrow some books. The librarian showed us how to borrow books and explained

how to take care of them at home. The mobile library was actually a box full of books and we were so excited! I chose my favorite one and from that day I have been borrowing books. Now I can read one or two books in a week, depending on their size. My favourite are cultural, social, history and cooking books.”

“Reading the books has really influenced me and I am learning a lot. The libraries help us improve our knowledge and helps our community develop an interest in reading and studying. Everyone in the community is very happy about the mobile libraries. I’m really grateful to Save the Children for bringing us a mobile library, but I want to request that they provide new books so we can keep studying and learning.”

Fahima goes to school

Fahima's family is from Ghazni province, from an area where there were no educational opportunities for girls. Three years ago, when the family emigrated to Kabul, Fahima's father tried to enrol her in a government school, but the school refused because she was too old to register for first grade.

"My family tried to find a way for me to go to school or some other place to learn and become educated but unfortunately all the doors were closed for me because of my age. I was very disappointed. I thought I would never have the opportunity to study and that I would just stay at home like my mother, who cannot read and write."

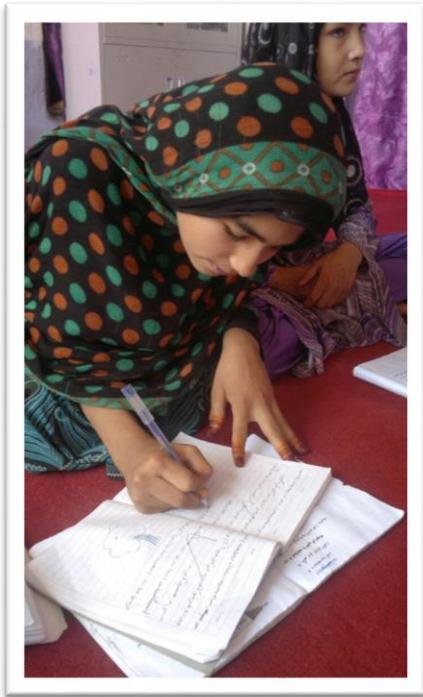


Despite being illiterate, Fahima's father fully supports her education: "One day my father came home very happy. He had just found out that Save the Children would establish some accelerated learning classes in our village for the girls who were too old to attend government schools. I went with my mother to the teacher's house to register for classes."

Now Fahima is in fourth grade. She can read and write and helps her younger brothers and sisters with their studies. "I am very happy to be in fourth grade and to be able to read and write. My family is also very happy to see me fulfil my dreams. I'm really grateful to Save the Children and the STAGES project for giving me this opportunity." Fahima wants to become a teacher in the future to help children learn to read and write.

As part of the STAGES project, Save the Children has established 196 accelerated learning classes, which help older girls catch up on primary education with intensive classes that allow girls to complete two grade levels in a year, completing the primary cycle in just three years. The programme helps them transition to government schools where they can begin secondary school with other girls their age. Save the Children train teachers and school management committees, provides books and learning materials for the classes and helps parents and communities advocate for children's right to education.

Learning close to home



Like most girls in her traditional community, Kamilla wasn't allowed to attend school, but spent her time at home, helping with household chores and studying in a religious school in a neighbour's home. Even though her family wanted her to get an education, they didn't allow her to register at the government school because it was too far away from their home and they were worried about her safety. There was a private school nearby, but it was too expensive for her family.

"I was working at home and I was always busy with housework. My mother is a police woman and she keeps a close eye on us. She only lets us go to relatives' homes, but I really wanted to go to school – other girls were attending and I wanted to go too."

When Save the Children established the accelerated learning classes in her village, Kamilla's family agreed for her to attend because it was free, the classes were right in the community and they knew the teacher and school management committee members.

"In our village there are no schools where girls can study. When Save the Children staff came to our village and talked to our parents and elders about the accelerated learning classes, I was so happy that I promised myself that if I could enrol I would work hard and get good grades." Now Kamilla is in fourth grade and is fully motivated to continue her education and go to university: "I am confident now because I can read, write and learn many things very easily and want to keep studying."

Under the STAGES project, Save the Children has established 478 community-based classes, including 70 accelerated learning classes in Kandahar province where Kamilla lives. Accelerated learning classes like the one Kamilla attends give older girls the opportunity to complete primary school close to home in just three, offering intensive classes using government curriculum and textbooks which prepare the girls to attend a government secondary school when they finish. Save the Children trains teachers and school management committees and provides teacher, student and classroom kits which transform rooms contributed by the committee into classrooms.

The example of Shiwali

Until CRS opened an accelerated learning class, the people of Shiwali village had always been farmers and herders, without access to education, especially the girls who were discouraged from attending the government school because it was too far away.

Today, there are 25 young women in the community's accelerated learning class, studying year round without a vacation so that they can complete two grades in one year.



By the end of the STAGES project, the girls will have finished primary school and be ready to attend the nearest government school.

Moneer is the class' teacher. Given the usual segregation of men and women in Afghanistan, readers might be surprised to hear that there's a man teaching 25 young women in a traditional rural area. After all, Afghanistan is very conservative and many families don't allow their daughters to have contact with males from outside of the family.

In many cases, cultural restrictions against contact between unrelated males and females is one of the most significant barriers to education for girls in Afghanistan, particularly given the lack of female teachers and scarcity of girls' schools, but this community has broken with tradition. In Moneer's class, five of the students are either engaged or married and their husbands and fiancés have agreed that the young women may attend class, an unexpected decision in this remote village. Shiwali's willingness to choose a male teacher illustrates how far communities will go when it comes to educating and ensuring a better future for their children.

So what's different about Shiwali? The community is committed to making sure that their daughters have safe access to education; they've provided a space in the mosque which has been transformed into a classroom, complete with a blackboard and textbooks. And the community was so enthusiastic about having the young women attend school that the community's school management committee took the initiative to raise money and organised community members to build latrines for the class.

Shiwali is already beginning to see the fruits of their commitment to education, but there are many benefits which will only become apparent over the long term when the community has its own female doctors and teachers. Not only that, but research documents that education impacts women and their families communities in many ways; educated women tend to be healthier and have healthier and better educated children and that impacts the economic possibilities of both families and communities. And the example of Shiwali may encourage other villages in the area to send their daughters to school when they see the benefits. It's a long hard process, but it is clear that the community is fully committed.

A society without education is a society without spirit

In a village in Parwan, there's a teacher who contributes classroom space for two classes and teaches a community-based class too. CARE staff interviewed the teacher to learn more about what inspires him to support education: "The first time I stood up to teach a class, I knew that I would

support girls' education. To be honest, I really enjoyed that day, especially the moment when students called me teacher. That helped me gain credibility in my community; parents ask for my advice when they make a decision about their children's education and often ask me to take their daughters to school. Being trusted and respected in my community encouraged me to support and work for girls' education even more."

"When CARE approached our community to establish community-based lower secondary classes, I attended the first community meetings and promised to provide a space for classes, even though I already had boys studying in my house. When classes for girls began, we shifted the boys to another house in our village and my whole house, which is in a central and safe location, was used for classes for girls. CARE constructed a latrine too, so that it would be more comfortable for the girls. Now the house looks like a school; it has all of the necessary facilities. One room is used for a library and two are for the girls' classes. Most parents and students want to continue studying after Grade 9 if the classes are continued in our community."

"Recently, we had some visitors from the Ministry of Education and after they observed the classes, they promised to negotiate with provincial and district education offices to persuade them to support classes in our village as an outreach school from the nearest government school. I would be very happy if the Ministry of Education would take responsibility for these classes, because supporting them now would ensure a bright future for the girls tomorrow. If that really happens, we will have the first group of young graduate girls in our community and we'll have female teachers for our village. All this happened, because CARE took a step and approached our community. We are thankful for their generous and sincere support to our daughters."

Qara Wooba pulls together to overcome obstacles

Located in the mountainous highlands, the community of Qara Wooba, like so many remote communities in Afghanistan, is isolated from nearly everything. Community members know that they have to work together to confront the many challenges they face because of the remote location of their community.

The village is 30 kilometres from the district capital and seven kilometres from the nearest government school. In the age of cars and airplanes, 30 kilometres should seem like a hop-skip-and-a-jump, however, along the rocky footpaths of Afghanistan, the slightest change in weather can turn small streams into lakes, dirt roads to half metre deep mud, and scenic walks into treacherously muddy or snowy slopes. Most of the year, 30 kilometres in the remote central highlands is dangerously far.

Qara Wooba's remote location has meant centuries of isolation from services such as formal education, access to markets and health services, and subsistence living. Most community members in Qara Wooba admit that they do not have enough income to support their families and until 2013, there was not a single, literate female in the community. A handful of village men were lucky enough to have gained a basic primary education by staying with relatives while studying in the district centre, but 7 kilometres of treacherous mountain paths was too far for any child born in Qara Wooba to safely walk to school. Basic education was merely a dream and life in the village went on as it had for centuries.

In 2013, the fate of Qara Wooba changed forever. Through the STAGES project, CRS mobilised Qara Wooba community members to lay the groundwork for the first, and most important, basic service to make its way to the village – education – when a community-based primary class was established in the village. In coordination with the District Education Department, CRS helped the community to select school management committee members, and trained them on their responsibilities so that they could champion Qara Wooba’s move



away from isolation. School management committee members took their roles and responsibilities very seriously, rallying the community members together to resolve challenge after challenge.

The first education-related challenge facing Qara Wooba was the selection of a qualified teacher to facilitate the CBE class. Even the best educated community members had only a primary education, so their community reached out to a nearby village for support, even though the closest village is too far to walk to every day. The community pressed forward, however, thinking about the opportunity to provide an important service to their children. The community identified a qualified teacher from the neighbouring village and the school management committee members agreed to provide the teacher with free accommodation in return for teaching the class. Qara Wooba finally had access to education!

Every winter Qara Wooba is completely cut off from the district capital when the snowy mountain passes leading to the village become impassable. Even in April, as the 2015 school year began, the road to Qara Wooba remained blocked by snow. CRS staff needed to visit the class to deliver the textbooks and school supplies but were unable to reach the community. Luckily, years of isolation had prepared community members to work together to tackle challenges. School management committee members asked CRS to drive as far as they could with textbooks and school supplies.

CRS vehicles were able to drive halfway to the community and community and school management committee members led donkeys across the rocky, muddy footpaths to meet the vehicle.

At the halfway point, CRS staff loaded the donkeys with bundles of textbooks and school supplies and community members transported the supplies back to the community. Qara Wooba was able to begin the school year on time and with all the materials they needed in spite of the snow.

Qara Wooba’s challenges do not stop after winter, however. As spring thaws the heavy winter snows in Qara Wooba, an icy lake forms between the community classroom and many students’ homes. Young students cannot cross this lake. To resolve this issue, in 2015, school shura members mobilised the community to build a bridge across the lake using local materials such as stones, beams and sticks. The bridge was built entirely by the volunteer efforts of community members.

In the summer of 2015, shura members again mobilised the community to donate their time and resources to build a new classroom for students because the room being used for classes was dark and poorly ventilated. The construction process was initiated and funded by the community and is now nearly complete.

Although Qara Wooba has long been isolated from the world, it is becoming better connected day by day. The success of this community has made it a destination for CRS-facilitated exposure visits, where less capable school management committee members from other communities learn from the Qara Wooba management committee. They are taking the lessons of Qara Wooba back to their own communities. Education might be the first basic service available to Qara Wooba, but won't be the last now that Qara Wooba has discovered their own potential for change!

Teaching and learning

The village is one of the most remote in Parwan province and the community doesn't have access to health care stores or government schools. Most of the population is illiterate and it's a hard life, especially in winter, when roads are covered and snow.

But there's a bright spot in the community since AKF established a community-based primary class.

When AKF surveyed the community, 22 year old Sayed took an immediate interest in the community-based classes. Sayed might seem to be an unlikely choice for teacher; he contracted polio as a young man and is physically disabled. He dropped out of seventh grade and was earning a living repairing clocks, radios and televisions, but the community nominated him to be the class teacher because of his reputation for honesty, commitment and hard work.



Sayed was trained as a teacher and has been one of the most enthusiastic participants in training sessions, and he always makes time to share what he learns with members of the school management committee and parents to increase support for education in the community. Even though he has to travel an hour to participate in the Teacher Learning Circle held at the nearest government school, he's a regular participant in discussions and learning activities with other community-based and government school teachers from the area.

Sayed says that the establishment of the community based class in the village has changed his students' lives; they would have remained illiterate if it weren't for the class. But it's also changed his life; he's also returned to school and is currently in tenth grade. Sayed credits the class with changing his life and motivating him to continue his own education and hopes to study law at the university and advocate for the rights of disabled people in Afghanistan.

Shamingul and Ferozsha, two of Sayed's students say: "Our teacher always encourages us to study and gives us homework. He treats us with respect and affection, and we hope that this programme will continue so that we can complete our education and become teachers and doctors in the future." Rasul, a member of the school management committee adds "Sayed always comes to class on time and is kind to the students. He's a good teacher and always lets us know if our children have a problem. He asks us to help and support him if he needs any support and we do. We hope that these great community-based classes will continue to provide education to our community's children, because this is our only hope for the children.

2. BRAC, Afghanistan

Mentoring programme is bringing me closer to my dream of becoming a journalist

Maryam, aged 12, is a Grade 8 student in Kabul city. She has one younger brother, her father is an employee of Rural Rehabilitation development ministry and her mother is a teacher.

Maryam has been involved in the BRAC mentoring programme since 2014. She enjoys being a mentor in her class and believes that the programme has brought many changes to their social and academic life. She said, *“I got very motivated to act as a leader of my classmates. It made me feel very self-confident and capable of solving most of my problems. In the past, my classmates didn’t pay attention to class decoration or cleanliness, but now they are really interested to use all the materials given by BRAC in creating wall magazines and charts.”*



She also mentioned that before the beginning of this programme most of her classmates couldn’t solve their problems or ask any questions they had regarding lessons. The teachers had to cover their lesson plan and they couldn’t help all the students with their questions. Now, the class is divided into four groups. Each group is headed by a mentor who is responsible for eight to 10 mentees. *“The mentees feel free to share their problems with us.”*



Maryam’s two favourite co-curricular activities are the mathematics competition which is held in the class by dividing the class into two groups. She said, *“This activity has helped most of my classmates to improve their weaknesses in this subject.”* The other one is debating. She said, *“As my dream is to be a journalist in the future, debating has improved my communication and critical thinking skills and I believe this approach will reach me to my dreams.”*

Finally, Maryam concluded by praising the work of their resource teacher. She said that the resource teacher is always available to support them on any issue they share with her. At the end, she suggested expanding the mentoring programme to other schools because she wants other girls to get benefit from it.

Khotera came back to school

Khotera, aged 15, lives in Kahalak, a remote village of Shebergan district under Jawjjan province. Her father is a marginal farmer.

The government school is too far from her house and the road is not safe for girls. From her childhood, she had a dream to go to school but poverty and distance from the school were significant barriers. There are six members in her family. They lead a simple life as her father is the only earning member in her family. Khotera and her sisters support her father’s work. Her dreams

were revived in 2013 when a BRAC surveyor came to the village to discuss opening a community-based school for girls.

When the surveyor came to their house, her mother expressed an interest in sending her younger sister to school. Khotera became very upset and told her mother she wanted to go to school – but her mother did not agree. Her mother told her that she had lost her chance for education as she had become an adult. Then her younger sister told her mother that she would not go to school without Khotera. Her mother agreed that Khotera could go and Khotera was admitted to Kahalak -2 BRAC School. It was the best day of her life when she walked into in her new school!

Every day for a year Khotera went to school with her sister and worked hard. She was happy with lessons and the school environment. Within one year she was able to read, write, make simple sentences, add and subtract.

Suddenly Khotera was married according to her father's wishes and her father stopped her schooling. She became disappointed but did not lose hope. She convinced her husband and her husband convinced her father. After two months, she received permission from her father to continue schooling and came back to school.

After completing her education, Khotera wants to be a health care provider because there is a need for female health care providers in her village. She is happy to use her knowledge to help her youngest sisters to complete their lessons.

Lima is happy to get a school on her doorstep

Lima, aged 12, did household work with her mother in remote village under the Ganikhil district in Nangarhar province as girls are not allowed to go to school. Her father is a day labourer and in 2012, due to security problems, her family migrated to Mojburabad of Jalalabad city from Ganikhil.

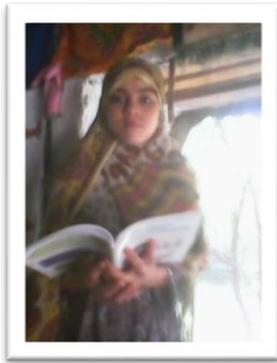
In Mojburabad, Lima lives in a rented house with her two brothers and parents. In 2014, she got a chance to study in the Mojburabad BRAC School. The school is very near to her house and there is no resistance from community members to girls' education. Now she is a Grade 3 student.



Lima is very happy to have the chance to go to school. Her teacher says she is very attentive and attends regularly. She enjoys the school and wants to be a doctor.

Twelve year old Azro goes to school

Arzo is a Grade 3 student in Kuz Qalai naw community-based girls' school. She is 12 years old. Her father is a shopkeeper. Five years ago her extended family migrated to Kuz Qalainaw in Surkrood district. They came for the security and employment opportunities. As they don't have any land, they live in a rented house. Her father maintains the family through the income from the small business. Arzo has one sister and three brothers.



Her elder sister (16 years old) works with her mother in house. Her father did not allow her elder sister to go to school. Her father considers her an adult and says has missed her opportunity to go to school. Her three brothers are small and they are studying with Arzo. They used to work in the home with their mother and collect wood for cooking.

Azro's teacher says she attends regularly and is very active in class. Arzo wants to be a teacher.

The government school is 4 kilometres from their village. Her teacher says that all girls of the community were illiterate before establishment of the BRAC school. Now community people are happy to have a school.

The winner is not the one who never fails, but the one who never gives up

Alia, aged 13, is a Grade 8 student who goes to Lese Qalai Bakhtyar school in Kabul, supported by the BRAC Education Stipend programme. She said, *"I was in Grade 4 when I had to leave my school and give up my dreams of being a doctor. Since I entered school I had only one aim - to study hard as I can and to serve as a life saver for those who die due to the poor health care system in our country."*

Alia added, *"I stopped going to school because of the cost and the long distance. On the way, I was bothered by boys. When my parents realised this, they stopped me going to school and convinced me to stay at home and save the money spent on my uniform and stationary."*

"I was mocked by our relatives and the girls who lived in the neighbourhood. They said there was no chance I would go back to school, that I would stay illiterate and run errands around house. I could only cry silently, but I never lost my hope and I was sure one day I would go back to school."

"I am really grateful to the BRAC Education stipend programme for helping me fulfil my dreams. When I joined school two years ago, I took a grade promotion test (as I had dropped out in Grade 4) and made it into Grade 5. Now I am in Grade 8. Now, I have no barrier in the path of education and my family is not preventing me anymore from pursuing my education. The "student organiser" takes us from school to home and vice versa safely and the stipend money covers the expenses of my school requirements."

Alia's teachers said, *"Alia is one of the top students of our school who is very regular in her attendance. Her talent has even amazed her other classmates though she was away from her education for a long time. She is even able to help her other classmates and we thank BRAC for being very supportive to the Afghanistan education system."*



3. Childhope, Ethiopia

A teacher of choice: How female teachers are shepherding change in rural Ethiopia

Girls in many schools of Ethiopia, particularly rural ones, typically do not perform as well as boys. Domestic work mean girls cannot always attend school regularly, or do necessary study at home. CHADET's Girls Education Challenge project not only supports the most vulnerable girls to stay in school, but also supports them to do well while there. This is achieved by supporting teachers to provide intensive academic tutorials as well as broader care and support for targeted girls.



The results can be impressive. One rural school teacher named Mastewal has been supported by CHADET to ensure her girls stay in school (despite the burden of domestic labour or the risk of early marriage) and are able to do well there.

The small town which Mastewal works in sits in the rural highlands of South Gondar, Amhara. To reach it you leave the asphalt road, cross a river, and walk for almost an hour along paths that cut through neat fields of maize, tef and millet, interrupted by forest glades that conceal orthodox churches. Local people pass by in traditional white blankets (gabis) on their way to church or fields, and cows graze under the supervision of their family's herders. Traditional houses smell of burning frankincense when you pass, hinting at coffee ceremonies inside.

The school is very basic, but well kept, and surrounded by trees that host chattering birds like the bold weavers that dart around in bright yellow flashes. Long grass and meadow plants give a peaceful atmosphere, and little children gather up armfuls to take home as animal fodder. Not far from the school is the teachers' block, a large traditional house made of woven sticks and mud, with a tin roof and tin doors. It has been divided into 14 very simple rooms for the young teachers who are posted to this picturesque but challenging location.

Mastewal is CHADET's focal teacher, a young woman who seems remarkably unbowed by her remote rural circumstances. She is not from the local area but is gracious to the parents and community elders, and they clearly accept her. Amharic is her subject, but as a GEC focal teacher she also facilitates Life Skills sessions, and has been trained to run the Girls Club. For the girls she teaches, Mastewal is a figure of education and ambition, but also care. She often puts a protective arm around her young charges, cajoling them to feel safe and speak.

Melesu seems so shy, almost hiding herself in a headscarf and looking down or away while people speak around her. But when asked about her experience she speaks quite forcefully, brandishing the determination she has beneath that timid exterior. CHADET staff are proud of her transformation.

Melesu's early schooling was sadly typical for girls in these rural areas. From her first enrolment she hardly attended and was performing badly. It was obvious why: as the oldest child in her family, it fell to her to look after all her siblings and assist her mother in running the house. Mastewal remembers how she might see her in school on a Monday, then on Tuesday she'd be gone, and so on. Her work was average at best, and she wasn't keeping up.

At some point Melesu's family decided she should take the traditional route and get married. School seemed so unpromising, and the bride wealth that would be gained from her marriage would be transformative for the entire family. Her mother had calculated that it would support the younger children to go to school and be able to succeed there.



Melesu found out about the plan. Her father had already received some of the bride wealth from the suitor's family and Melesu saw him giving it to her mother. She understood clearly what it meant: *"I felt so afraid and unhappy, because I knew I would be taken from school and I would leave a life of learning and friends"*.

But Melesu also knew she had a chance to stop it. The Letter Link box - brightly painted in yellow, green and red - had been used by others at the school, and in their Girls Club with Mastewal they were repeatedly told why it was there.

They were also reminded regularly that marriage of children was illegal so they shouldn't be afraid to report it. Into the box went her letter, a short piece of writing that was her SOS call.

Mastewal contacted the community volunteers, well-known to all and well versed in the Girls Education Challenge principles. Together they started discussions with the parents, reminding them both of the law and of how CHADET could support Melesu to stay in school. Six months have now passed since the marriage was stopped and Melesu became a CHADET beneficiary.

Melesu's mother Bezunesh is a good woman, traditional in every way but with a strength of her own. She actually believes firmly in education, but feels poverty left her little choice: *"The fact that I'm not educated really matters. That's why I decided to marry my child. I knew that with the bride wealth for her marriage I could afford to buy the things her younger siblings needed for school. It was important for me that at least some of my children got a proper education. Now that we are supported with the school costs for Melesu, and now that we are more aware about the bad consequences of child marriage, I would never take that decision again."*

Mastewal and Bezunesh are Melesu's support team, cheering her on as she steadily improves at school and gets more confident at life. Mastewal reports happily: *"She has a really good approach to tutorials. After her marriage was stopped and she started attending them, she began to improve at school, and her grades have really gone up since then."*

As well as the tutorials, a shift has occurred in how Melesu's family sees the value of her education. When the marriage was stopped and Melesu became a CHADET beneficiary, Mastewal, community volunteers and GEC committee members talked a lot to her parents about this. Melesu still helps at home but is now given time to study and to attend tutorials on Saturdays. It has been satisfying for everyone that this has made her marks increase. Bezunesh, her mother, says with a quiet pride: *"I want her to continue her education, and after that she can choose what she wants to do"*.

Meanwhile, Melesu is about to begin Grade 7. Her favourite subject is Maths and, given her gratitude to Mastewal, it is not surprising that she wants to be a teacher when she grows up.

Maritu is Mastewal's star pupil, and at twelve years old is extraordinarily articulate. She is a CHADET beneficiary whose education nearly ground to a halt because of domestic labour. When her parents separated she went to live with her grandparents, but their version of her life did not fit at all with her schooling. With her typical clarity she explains: *"When I started at school I couldn't really concentrate, and I couldn't study at home. I really had to work. I had to fetch water, I had to cook wat [traditional stew], I had to do everything. There was no room for study."*

"The GEC committee made me a CHADET beneficiary because I was struggling. I received textbooks and pens and a uniform, and I started going to tutorials in Maths, English and Amharic. Through the tutorials I got better, and now my marks are really good. In the first semester last year I came second in the class, then in the second semester I came first. That has meant my family sees the worth of my schooling, and they're happy for me to continue with it and to study as much as I need to."

As well as academic progress, Maritu is thriving on the fortnightly Girls Club and twice-a-week Life Skills classes held by Mastewal.

"The Girls Club has really helped me participate and speak up. With Mastewal we talk about lots of things that affect girls in this area, like child marriage and domestic labour, and the risks for us as we walk from place to place. We also talk about the Letter Link box as a way to report things, and we perform dramas about these things sometimes."

Young girls are good at backing each other up, and Maritu is no exception. While she now knows the Girls Club and Life Skills lessons by heart, she is making sure other girls do too. She is close to Melesu for example, and feels a duty to help her out of her shell.

"Life Skills is making us girls less shy. Melesu was so shy she could hardly speak, but after life skills education she felt ok to sit down like this and talk. I'm a peer educator who works with the teacher to share the messages. It helped me to express myself and I'm helping others do that too."

Maritu knows that she and the other girls are challenging society's status quo with their new-found school performance and confidence. This includes a changing relationship with boys, who would always do better at school because they had so much less work at home and could study at will. Maritu sees the change: *"Now that we're better than them, the boys have to work hard to reach us."*

And she might be concealing a smile when she goes on to report: *"Tesfaye was the boy who was number one before I took over. He was pretty cross when the marks were released, and he still is..."*

It is fun for the girls, but teachers - plus parents, sisters and others in the community - are keen to prevent boys feeling excluded, and are considering ways to extend the assistance to them.

Maritu seems destined to challenge more than her own community's way of thinking. She has discovered Physics, and through devouring books on it she has decided, in no uncertain terms, that she will be an engineer. Tesfaye is said to be already feeling the heat...

Mastewal could not do her work without the support of parents, particularly mothers. In the school's area every single mother is illiterate, and in many cases the regret these women feel at missing out on their own education has become a driving force for their daughter's.

Amsale is one such mother. A few months ago, a man approached her husband and asked to marry their eight-year-old daughter Beletu. Despite this being considered 'normal' by many in the area, she and her husband took a modern decision: *"After some discussion we refused. We've had community conversations about child marriage, and there's a GEC committee that made plain it is punishable by law. So we refused the man."*

It was not just the law that was behind this decision. For Askale, her own regrets about missing out on an education were paramount. Her beautiful face, a mirror of Beletu's, is set with determination as she explains this: *"I was married very young, in fact my parents arranged the marriage before I was born. There was actually a school at that time, and even as a child I regretted not being able to go. I regret it even more now. Because I walk on mud with bare feet, I work hard all the time to support my family, I have to bleed to support my family. I feel sure that if I'd attended school it would have been easier. So what I'm suffering now should end here. It's enough. I don't want my children to suffer like I do. I want them to continue their education and pick a better life. They'll be able to get a job, to earn money, and to have a better life. I've seen girls from this area achieve that; I know it's possible through education."*

The tiny Beletu listens intently, and then tells her side of the story. Sometimes she hides her face with a scarf and speaks so softly that she is almost drowned out by raucous weaver birds in nearby nests. The marriage wasn't cancelled immediately, and she had witnessed her parents discussing it. Possessed with worry, she suffered in school: *"In the first semester I scored really low, because I'd learned that my parents were going to marry me. I felt so bad, all I could think about was the marriage. It would have been the end of school. And my friends would be still attending school, while I'd be bleeding my life away like my mother, just pouring it into the life of farming. I went to my teacher and told her, because I wanted my teacher to help stop it."*

Mastewal certainly did make sure it was stopped. She remembers going straight to Beletu's mother, and her relief at hearing that they were already planning to cancel the marriage. "That was a good result", she says, with a small nod of her head.

For what looks like such a small school, it's amazing how busy the Letter Link box is. It is opened twice a week by Mastewal and a fellow teacher who runs the Good Brother's Club, which also emphasises the importance of stopping child marriage. Responding to what they find in that yellow box puts these teachers on the frontline of safeguarding children.

Mastewal remembers one incident where all her training was put to the test: *"Once we got a message that said, 'I'm going to be married, please help me'. I wanted to respond quickly because the girl was so worried. After talking to the girl – who was very upset, and cried as she told me the story – I went straight to the rural area to find the parents, and I asked for her father by name. The man I asked said to me, 'There's no one here by that name'. I moved on and then he called me back and said, 'Ok, that's me, what do you want?' I explained what I knew, reminded him that child marriage was illegal and that his daughter was crying about it so he'd better cancel the plans. He got really angry and shouted at me, 'She's my child, not your child, and I'll do whatever I want with her! You have no right to say anything about it!' I was shaken, it was upsetting, but I went to the GEC committee to get them involved. The police are part of that committee and they went to the guy and warned him about the law, insisting he terminate the marriage. He was made to sign a commitment paper to that effect, and told him he would be jailed if he didn't stick to it. So that was the end of that."*

"I was trained to do this kind of safeguarding work if a child reports anything to me or puts a report in the Letter Link box. And I'm part of a group of people in this community who can put a stop to a girl's marriage."

The GEC Committee consists of nine community authorities, from traditional elders to heads of government divisions, women's associations and the local school. In that area the GEC committee is alert and active, working closely with teachers like Mastewal and with community volunteers as well as parents themselves. They are very clear about their role: *"We are responsible for selecting girls to become CHADET's GEC beneficiaries. We look for those at risk of marriage, migration, domestic labour and street involvement. And we know what is going on in this kebele, so we know who to look for."*

“It’s in the Ethiopian Constitution that no parent should marry their child, and we make sure that is known in this kebele. We teach the message at church programmes, and make sure it is well heard.

“We also respond to cases, when teachers or volunteers come and make us aware. We go to parents, tell them they need to terminate the marriage, and remind them that it’s punishable by law. We have a commitment letter that we drafted and we make them sign that too. We recently had a case where two children were betrothed to each other. We had to actually imprison the parents, lock them in a kebele administration building until they agreed to terminate the marriage and signed a commitment paper.

“We have very poor households who don’t send their children to school because they can’t afford basic items like books and pens and uniforms. It’s made a big difference that those things have been provided, it’s increased the enrolment of girls from poor households.

“And there’s a change happening, where the marks of the girls are getting better than the marks of the boys. It may be that we need to think about support for the boys in future, we don’t want to swing too far the other way.

“It’s a social change that’s happening. We think the community here is positive about this change. Parents who were not educated are very determined about their children being educated, they’re very aware of the importance of education. They find a way to make the change, like putting less pressure on their daughters to work in the home, or making sure they also have time and space to study. We think this generation is in charge of real change, and they’re doing it for their community and their country.”

Catching the sky: How small savings amount to big change

Poor parents have little to spend on their daughter’s education, and spend even less if they do not value it. In rural Ethiopia CHADET identifies girls who are at risk of dropping out of school for these reasons and supports them as well as their vulnerable parents, who are very often single mothers. By providing the costs of the girl’s education, emphasising its importance, and supporting a mother’s ability to earn money, it becomes much more likely that they girl can not only stay in school but succeed there.

This story is set in a green, flat kebele of rural Amhara. There are plenty of oxen resting, grazing and fighting, while houses and old trees stand guard. People walk well-trodden paths from the road to their houses, women with bundles and men with sticks or guns rested on their shoulders. Children stay near their family’s stock, with sticks to herd them, but very often they are absorbed together in a good game that has to be interrupted when they leap up to chase strays.

Alemwork was born in this place, and got married there. She has five children. She did not expect her husband to die and leave her a single mother, with so much to deal with.

Until this year she worked in any way she could, making money through brewing and selling tella, the local millet beer, and stitching yards of traditional woven cotton so that it could be used for clothes and blankets.

But this did not bring much, and life was far from easy:

“There is a saying here, ‘A poor person dreams of fetching water’. It means we work so hard, every day, that even when we’re sleeping we dream of hard work!”

Banchi is Alemwork’s youngest daughter, and she has felt the pinch of her family’s poverty. At school she didn’t have an exercise book for any of the nine subjects, nor did she have pens or a uniform.

Unmotivated and unsure even what school would achieve, she and her mother both remember that it wasn't going very well.

Then Banchi became a CHADET beneficiary, with her school costs covered and extra tutorial classes provided to improve her grades. With these, she found new understanding: *"In the regular classes you often miss something out. But in the tutorial classes the teachers teach you everything, really thoroughly, so you understand."*

Steadily improving at school, Banchi also gained new confidence, and a new plan: *"Before, I never thought I would even pass. Now I think better than that, I want to pass and I want to one day become a judge. I want to serve by providing justice to people. You see bad things happen to people here, and I would like to be a judge to imprison the people responsible."*

"Before, we used to be behind the boys at school, they always had better grades. Because we had to go to school and then come straight back and work in our homes, while the boys could go anywhere and study."

"Now our marks are equal with them, and sometimes we even get better marks than them."

At the same time, Banchi's mother Alemwork was enrolled in the Community Savings Support Group, for parents of beneficiary children who are struggling to make ends meet. They meet weekly, and each time they have to contribute a saving, however small. Alemwork managed to put aside 10 Birr every week from her brewing and stitching work, even though it was not easy. It took her and her group ten months to reach their target of 400 Birr per person, after which they could start taking business loans. "It's been a very long journey and the saving was really hard because I was making so little money", she recalls. But Alemwork had the support of the group, and their community worker Kasew. His was not an easy job either: *"We actually complained a lot to Kasew, saying to him, 'It's getting difficult!' And he kept encouraging us until finally we got to the target to take a loan for businesses. He was very patient - at some points people were quite tough on him, saying that he was keeping our money for himself!"*



Luckily for the group and for Kasew, the day came when they could take out their loans. What they had saved was matched by CHADET, so Alemwork could afford to make the biggest purchase she'd ever made: two female sheep, each with a lamb. She remembers the day well: *"That day when I went to get the sheep I just thought, 'It is so hard to catch the sky. But look at me! It's all so unexpected, and so good.'"*

She hopes the sheep will keep reproducing, and will use the money she makes to keep her children in school, and keep them doing well.

Banchi is excited about the sheep, and what they stand for, but also excited for her mother.

"I'm proud of my mum, even if she's not educated. She owns livestock now. And she always tells me to go to school and study hard, she doesn't make me work at home if it means missing out on my studies."

Again, a mother's regret at missing out on school is pushing a daughter's ambition. Alemwork sees clearly the link between their two lives.

“Whenever I sign, I use my finger, and that is a very shameful thing to do. I wish I could have learned, but I did not. It is my regret, that I didn’t get an education, so I don’t want my daughter to have that as well. It’s enough that I have that regret.”

She also sees the difference school makes to girls today.

“Education is really changing girls around here. I have an older daughter who didn’t go to school, and Banchi thinks for herself more than she does. Our relatives will say to Banchi, ‘When are you going to get married?’ and she’ll say to them, ‘It’s none of your business’. She just wants to finish her education.”

“Sure enough, marriage is not on the radar for Banchi yet. She says the Life Skills class taught her she could say no to a marriage proposal, and even gave her confidence to help her friends: “Recently my friend’s parents wanted to marry her, but I told her she could say no and that she should tell the teacher to make sure it’s stopped.”

As if to emphasise that she will add no pressure, Alemwork makes her laugh by adding, *“I was pretty fed up with marriage, I wouldn’t wish it on you!”*

Having a strong mother is clearly vital for Banchi. At the same time, Alemwork is strengthened by her bright young daughter, and enjoys the change she is bringing into their lives.

“I grew up here, and in some ways not much has changed. But girls’ lives are changing. I got married really young, didn’t go to school, and had my first baby when I was 14. But it’s different with Banchi. She tells me things, and sometimes she’ll advise me by saying, ‘Come on, don’t do that’. I think of my own mother sometimes, and what she would think of all this change. She has passed away, but I think she would be very proud of Banchi.”

Escaping abduction: How Bezu fought for her education

In many parts of Ethiopia it is still common for girls to be married young, well before 18 and before they can get a school education. In Oromia region, it is traditional for a girl’s ‘abduction’ by a suitor to be arranged, often with the knowledge of her parents. This is a particularly traumatic form of engagement for a girl, and one that signals the end of childhood, family life, and education.

CHADET targets girls at risk of early marriage, making sure they can first avoid it and then continue with their education. This can only be done with the support of a girl’s family and community, who are supported in both their livelihoods and in campaigns to increase their understanding of the value of girls’ education.

Bezu is a girl from a rural area inhabited by agricultural families. At 13, she escaped a planned abduction outside her school. CHADET supported a process where her marriage plans were cancelled by her parents and her education supported.

Here, Bezu explains the difficult time she went through, the support she received, and how her life is now back on track: *“When I was 13 I was finishing Grade 7. I didn’t know but a marriage had been arranged for me by my parents, to a man I didn’t know.*

“In this area families will arrange a marriage for their daughter, without her knowing, and then agree that the man can abduct the girl. It’s cultural. It’s because a girl would otherwise be resistant. Once you’ve been abducted you’re his.

“I didn’t know about the plan and I had never seen that man. He lives in town, not an old man but not a young man either. Apparently his family had visited my parents several times to discuss it.

“The day of the abduction I was in school. While I was preparing to leave there were men waiting for me outside, ready to abduct me right in front of the school. They had paid a boy at the school 10 Birr to point me out to them. The Principal of the school heard about what was happening because that boy reported it to him, and he wanted to support me. He couldn’t approach those guys because they wouldn’t have listened to him, but he found me and told me not to go out the front gate. He helped me escape out the back of the school.

“I ran home and asked my parents why they had done that. They said that he was rich, from town, and could look after me, so it was better that I accepted. I said, ‘No, I don’t want this, I want to continue my education!’ I tried to negotiate with my mother but she was very much in favour of the marriage. So I went back to the Principal and through him I ended up becoming a CHADET beneficiary. I wanted to finish my education and not be given as a wife to a man I didn’t know.

“My parents kept insisting on the marriage, but I was very resistant. I kept telling them that if they tried to marry me I would run away, I would go to another country, anywhere. That made them listen to me a bit more. And by then, CHADET were putting pressure on the issue, making people aware. My parents were part of the Community Conversations that CHADET organised. All through those I was praying that the plans for my marriage would be called off.

“It took a lot of time. There were a lot of arguments in my house, day and night. My mum and my dad kept saying to me, ‘Why are you refusing? That man is rich, he’ll look after you in town’. They also said, ‘What will our relatives say about us, with you not listening but having your own your opinions, which in this place is wrong?’ It was really tense, there were so many arguments.

“I have an older brother who lives in town, and he supported me. He even came to speak to my parents and tell them to cancel the marriage.

“I also have an older sister who is working in Dubai, and I contacted her to ask if I could go and be with her to escape the marriage. But she said to me, ‘It’s worse here, it’s a terrible life, you’d be better staying where you are and getting married’.

“My parents started slowly changing through the Community Conversations that CHADET were organising, and also by talking to the Director of the school who was supporting me continuing at school. He told them that I should continue with my education so that I can have a future.

“Eventually, their thinking changed and the marriage was terminated. At last I could focus on my schooling again. My marks had got steadily worse since I found out about the marriage. But when I knew the marriage was over, and when I began attending tutorials, I started to improve.

“My parents used to think that I didn’t need to study at home, and that if I was going to the school library it was to play or meet boys. They’re getting better though. Recently they started trying to motivate me with my schooling, understanding that this is my path and wanting me to do well at it. They even tell me to study now!

“My parents are still part of community conversations and today I know that my father tells people how his daughter was rescued from early marriage. He tells them that if she hadn’t been rescued, she’d been carrying a big burden on her back, and wouldn’t have been able to complete her education. He is really supportive now.

“They’re expecting me to finish my education, and get in a better position. They hope I will support them in future too.

“I plan to finish my school and get a job, I’m not yet sure which. But I’m happy now, and feeling confident. If I’d been married, I would have suffered so much, but things are really different now.”

The reasons behind early marriage are complicated, rarely a simple case of parents being cruel. As Bezu recognised, her parents saw it as a security for her, and her father explains how this was particularly so because he did not see the value of education in terms of safeguarding Bezu's future. Now that Bezu is not only attending properly but also receiving tutorials that drive her marks up, her father is seeing education as more relevant and important.

"I have a lot of children and a lot of them have been to school and are now still here in my home. So I thought that Bezu might as well get married and then she'd have a secure life and not have to be a burden to me.

"But she said no, she was really resistant. And CHADET showed us that it's better if girls are educated. They changed our attitudes over time, and they also helped us to keep Bezu in school by providing for all the costs like books. She's doing well now. A father wants his daughter to reach somewhere better, so that's what I wish for her, and I hope God will help me.

"I had seen that education doesn't always make children successful, look at all the children I have still living with me. But Bezu is doing well. And there are a lot of people around here who've been educated and reached a better place. The director of the school is one, and certain administrators. These people can be role models."

Bezu is one face of the change occurring here when it comes to marriage and education of children. Her father, who used to be a famously stubborn element in Community Conversations, is now one of the strongest advocates of messages that support the choices and rights of children.

"In the old days it didn't matter what a child thought, it was just about the opinion of the parents. But that was very traditional, and it's not really good for children. Now things have changed, and it's better. Children shouldn't be forced to do things they don't want to do. We'll be better if we believe that."

Something has changed in Bezu, she has a determination clearly shaped by having been very angry, and by the many furious arguments that went on in the house. Her mother remembers how she resisted their rural way of life, refusing to wear traditional clothes or eat in the traditional way. Perhaps understandably she has a problem with men, and shocks her mother with this:

"Bezu has vowed to kick any man who comes to ask for her in marriage! She's also said that if anyone tries to marry her she'll commit suicide by hanging herself, and then that person will really get in trouble. And she says that if she doesn't do well at school and go to university, she'd prefer to join the police and live like a man rather than get married."

Looking at her striding across the compound in a very 'town' outfit, her mother exclaims, "She's like a man! She likes wearing trousers, she likes living like a man!"

But underneath her alarm at a teenage daughter's defiance, Bezu's mother is proud too. Because an important aspect of the new Bezu is a young woman's dedication to education, and her marks are improving. This is especially important to a mother who has long carried regret at missing out on education herself: *"I want Bezu to finish her education, train in something, and get a job. I only attended school until grade 2 before I was married and become the mother of 8 children. I don't want Bezu to end up like me. She should make a success of herself, and then get married and have two children, not more than that.*

"An educated person can reach anywhere. As long as she helps me and the country, she can be whatever she wants."

Getting Bezu to this point required a patient process of discussion, persuasion, material help for her to attend school, and academic help for her to perform well there. CHADET also supports her mother through a savings group, and after a year of regular saving she owns three sheep which are going to be used to pay school costs for the family's children. This, and the whole package of support, have given new strength to a mother who is ready to do things differently:

"Bezu's changing a lot, and so am I.

"CHADET trained me in savings and helped me buy three sheep. Bezu keeps feeding them and saying, 'I should feed these sheep because when I reach Grades 11 and 12, they're going to be the ones supporting me!'

"But CHADET also trained me in parenting. I'm old now, but if I was young again I'd want another daughter, because I'd raise her differently."

From fetching water to first in the class: The story of Zelalem

One of the major barriers for girls' education in Ethiopia is the burden of work. Whether at home or outside, it is customary for families to expect daughters to work hard in support of their family. This is particularly so in rural areas, where girls may fetch water, cook, wash clothes, look after younger children, and help look after the livestock and fields too. These tasks leave little time for school, or for studying after school. CHADET's work focuses on girls who are at risk of dropping out of school because their workload is too high. Supporting their families as well as them, this investment usually leads to an increase in girls' performance at school. In Zelalem's case it was exceptional. She tells her story here:

"I was born in this town, and I go to school here. I used to have a big burden of household activities. It was fetching water, cooking food, and also helping look after the crops and animals of my family. I used to not be able to attend school every day. I couldn't study either. I did ok at school, but not that well. I was in place 35 out of about 60.

"All my friends had the same work at home as I did. It is a normal thing here. It was frustrating, and it got more frustrating because as I grew up, so did the burden. It increased, because I was getting stronger and being given more to do.

"Then CHADET began to support me and my family. I started being able to attend school every day, and also to go to tutorial classes. Tutorial classes are very helpful because there are things you miss in regular classes, and in the tutorial classes they are clarified so that you really understand.

"Since then things have really picked up – I was number 1 in grade 5, then number 2 in grade 6. I'm in grade 7 now, and I think I'll get back to first place this year.

"I still have a lot of domestic work, but it no longer stops me from coming to school every day, for regular classes as well as tutorials. I also get to use the reading corner, which helps a lot with my personal study. We used to have a school library but it was for boys and girls and the boys were always there so girls didn't really use it.

"Being given a uniform and exercise books, and receiving tutorials, was very helpful but not the main change. Because I could have had all those things and still not been allowed to attend school. What changed was the attitude of my parents, especially my father.

"My father changed when he saw me receiving two awards from CHADET for my school achievement, one a normal award and one a special award. Because CHADET were supporting me, my father was part of their Community Conversations and he was present at the prize-giving day so he saw me being given those awards. Afterwards he gave a speech and he said, 'Today I am proud of my daughter, and I want

her to continue with her education and have a better life'. That day he changed. He was happy and excited about my education. It made me happy too. He used to not motivate me with my education but he started after that.

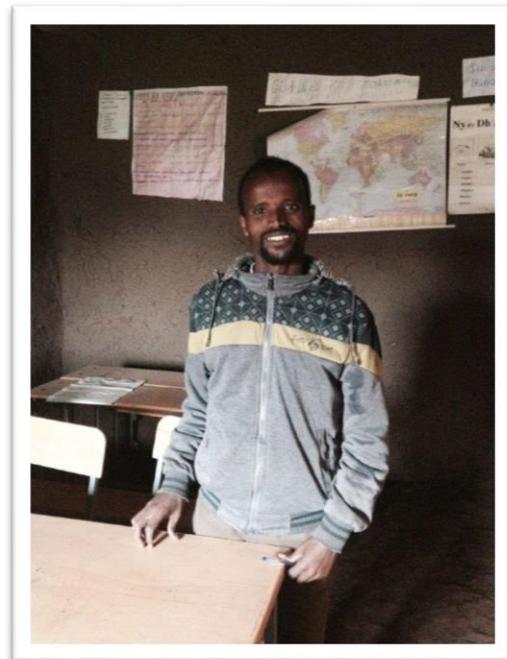
"I am part of the Girls Club and we also have Life Skills classes where we talk a lot about the problems for girls in this place. One of the things we emphasize is saying no to something you don't want. It's not as easy as it is for boys. Boys here have time for study. They're not as busy with household jobs, so they have free time that they can use for study, or for rest if they want."

Zelalem's teacher Mustafa looks proud as she tells the story of the tutorials and the awards she's won. He's been teaching for 8 years and is excited to be part of a project where he can see real improvements in students who were struggling.

Mustafa explains why he thinks tutorials are so effective: *"There are 60 students in a regular class, but in a tutorial class it's just 10 or 12 girls. They can really participate in such a small class, and without boys dominating. Zelalem is a really good student, especially at Maths which I teach her. And in the tutorial classes she's very participatory, and she also helps other students a lot."*

Indeed, Zelalem is very good at Maths, and enjoys it too: *"I like mathematics because I find that once I've learnt something, it's very easy to understand."*

Zelalem now has big plans for the future, well beyond her small town: *"Now I want to be a doctor, because I think this country should be full of healthy people. If I can study medicine and become a doctor, I will live in a big city and live a good life there."*



Leading a new generation: A Good Brothers Club supporting change for girls (and country)

CHADET knows that brothers and boys in general are crucial to changing attitudes towards girls' education. In one school two years ago, boys had the idea of creating a 'Good Brothers Club' to focus on their positive role and expand it. This became part of CHADET's Girls Education Challenge, with Good Brothers Clubs working in schools and communities to change attitudes and secure a better future for girls. One of these is thriving in the elementary school of a kebele in Oromia.

The school's Good Brothers Club now has 56 voluntary members, and its own committee. They meet every two weeks and their focal teacher Gemechu is trained to explain to them the key risks faced by girls, and the consequences of their marginalisation from education. He supports them to raise awareness in the school and in the community. Mustafa, the Secretary of the Club, explains how it works, why he believes in it, and what it's achieving.

"Two years ago CHADET introduced a Girls Club here, and then the Good Brothers Club to work alongside it and support it.

"The reason we have this Club is that girls face a lot of problems in this place. They have to work hard at home, and outside the home, and they aren't always able to come to school or study. Then they might be married off by their parents which means dropping from school completely.

“We see these things actually affecting girls here. It’s because of these things that their marks are not as high as they should be, or they are not as educated as they should be. Our fathers used to accept these things, they thought they were normal. And previously, lots of us boys would think about girls in not such a good way. We didn’t care about those problems they faced. The Good Brothers Club changed us. It made us see girls as sisters and respect their education. So we’re trying to support girls by removing those risks.”

“We raise money for girls’ education costs – like uniforms and exercise books for girls whose families can’t afford them – by selling tickets for concerts or prize draws that we organise.”

“We do dramas and puppet shows about issues facing girls and show them to the other children. We make them funny, but the messages come from what we discuss with our focal teacher at the Good Brothers Club meetings, and also from Life Skills classes. We do performances for parents too, because it’s not just about changing our attitudes, it’s about changing the attitudes of the community as well.”

“It’s good when you see the results. My neighbour is a girl who used to really struggle with school. She had such a burden of domestic work. She had sisters but her parents would always give her all the work, I think because she was shy and couldn’t say no. At some point she stopped going to school completely. I spoke to the focal teacher about it and people began discussing the issue with her parents so that they began to accept the importance of her education. She ended up living with her sister, and attends school regularly now.”

Listening to Mustefa, his friends and fellow Good Brothers Club members also want to share stories. They are serious about their roles and proud of what’s already been achieved in terms of girls’ education and girls’ lives. Belayneh, the Good Brothers Club auditor, adds his experience of encouraging a mother with very alarming views about her daughter’s education to attend a Community Conversations. These events are organised by CHADET to focus on girls’ education and bring together everyone from local elders to parents to students. After the mother gave her views, a process of positive change began.

“In this school I had a friend, a girl, whose mother was really rough on her and would keep her at home working. The girl would be washing clothes in the morning and her mother would say, ‘Keep washing, you don’t need to go to school’. She could hardly attend school, and I knew about it. But since I was involved in the Good Brothers Club I thought I could go there and say something. I told the parents about the coming Community Conversation and told them they should come. The mother came, and she gave a speech. She said, ‘Women and donkeys should be beaten, or they won’t be raised properly’. After that a lot of people started advising her, trying to change her attitudes. These days she does think differently, and her daughter is able to go to school and has a much lighter burden of work at home. Her daughter is a CHADET beneficiary now so gets support for her schooling.”

“It’s difficult to change some people’s attitudes, because their way of thinking about girls has been the same for a long time. We also used to think like our parents, before joining the Good Brothers Club. We understand the issues faced by girls better now, and we want to support them to get better grades and stick to school.”

For their motivation, the boys credit the guidance of their focal teacher Gemechu and the constant encouragement from CHADET community worker Amin for keeping them on track and optimistic. They also feel they’re getting somewhere. Ahmed is the Club’s treasurer and he admitted that when he first volunteered to join the club he thought it was a joke and was more curious than anything, but now he is a firm believer in what it can and should achieve.

“We’re seeing change. If we’d seen no change then it would have been difficult, but things are really changing these days. Through the Club and the Life Skills classes our attitudes shifted, and now we train others in the school and in the community. We want to create a new generation with a better attitude.”

It may not be easy to measure the change in attitudes, but one change that is easy to see is the improved school performance of girls. The first thing the school Principal noted about these Clubs, and the Life Skills classes that complement them, is that girls are dropping out of school less, and their marks are getting higher.

The focal teacher of the Girls Club, Beyenech, is another person excited to see this change: *“The Good Brothers Club advises other students, and directly support girls. It used to be that even if many girls were enrolled in this school, only about half were always here, and they were casual about lessons and didn’t do well. With messages about their education through the Good Brothers Club as well as the Girls Club and Life Skills classes, this is really changing now. Girls are now doing much better in this school, and getting higher marks.”*

It sounds straightforward, as if the challenges faced by girls can be halted by boys simply respecting and defending them as sisters. But it’s clearly not that easy, and not all boys feel so noble about supporting girls’ education as Mustefa, Ahmed, Belayneh and their other club members. A real risk, especially in places where boys face their own socioeconomic challenges and fears for the future, is that boys resent investments in girls that make them feel left out. Mustefa, a fair and intelligent young man, can clearly see this side of the story:

“We feel we’re here to change things. It’s not that easy. Some boys get jealous of girls getting all this attention and support, they say they are facing the same problems too so why aren’t they being supported. That’s an issue, but we explain that we’re trying to change issues like early marriage and domestic labour, they’re very big challenges for girls but not so much for boys. Boys do face other challenges though, like having to work to support themselves in school. Most of us go to school in the morning and then work in the afternoons, in any job we can find to support our school costs. I work selling shoes, Ahmed drives a horse cart, and other boys do different things.”

For the Good Brothers Club (and the Girls Club) to be successful, it needs to try to ensure every student feels their education is valued. But the boys also firmly share what they know about how wide the gulf is between girls and boys when it comes to the value of education and their ability to pursue it. They themselves were surprised at their earlier lack of awareness on this, and believe others will be too. It also helps that the Good Brothers Club is not all serious, instead its activities are fun. Gemechu explains:

“CHADET introduced this Good Brothers Club two years ago. They explained it to me, trained me, and I went around every class asking for volunteers. At first only a few boys joined, and then it grew. It’s popular now, and doing well.”

“This year we had an event for International Women’s Day on March 8. The boys joined girls from the Girls Club to make puppets for dramas about early marriage, risky migration, domestic labour and the value of education. Beyenech and I had been trained by CHADET to make puppets, and we taught the students in the Good Brothers Club and the Girls Club to create character out of them. They did, and it was very successful. The performance they did on early marriage was seen by people from 28 kebeles. That spread the message to a lot of people in many places, including where CHADET is not working and schools don’t have Girls Clubs or Good Brothers Clubs or Life Skills classes.”

Such a good relationship with the Girls Club is a key strength, and within their school the two have been joining forces to raise money in support of girls’ education in cases where a girl is not a CHADET beneficiary. It shows their commitment beyond an NGO project’s investment, their

ownership of the issue, and their ability to find solutions. Beyenech looks proudly at Mustefa, a young leader, as he describes how they supported her cause.

“Sometimes there is a girl really struggling with her education but she’s not a CHADET beneficiary, so her family won’t be able to buy her exercise books and other things to motivate her to come to school. We know the Girls Club well and when we found out about four such cases, we fundraised for them. We sold tickets for a prize draw, and we sold snacks, and with the money we bought four uniform sets which helped those girls be able to come to school.”

They believe in what they’re doing, have consistent support from CHADET, and are making progress in their school as well as community; but there is something else driving the success and enthusiasm of Mustefa, Ahmed, Belayneh and their peers in the Girls Club. Asking them ‘Why now?’, since the status of girls’ education in their area had languished for generations before theirs took it up as a problem to solve, they explained a bigger story. They described the new Ethiopia that will be theirs, a country that is developing and aspiring at sometimes breakneck speed. And in that bigger story, there is a chapter on girls’ education and the place of women in society which these young people are coming forward to write.

Mustefa explains: *“The more we discuss this issue, the more we are aware that our mothers and our forefathers used to be really bad with girls. In some cases they didn’t even let them go out of the house, let alone get an education. But now the country is developing, and it’s really changing. It’s our country, and we will be part of that change.”*

CHADET’s idea of Good Brothers Clubs, in support of Girls Clubs and its wider Girls Education Challenge, seems to have come at a very good time. Mustefa and his generation may have at first felt new to the issues and curious about the Club, but they are now truly making it theirs.

I burn like this for her: How a mother’s love, work and faith in education is transforming her daughter’s life

There are many parents who believe fervently in the value of education, often having missed out themselves, but struggle to meet the costs of it for their children. When CHADET started supporting local savings groups for parents of girls whose school attendance or performance was lacking, it hoped this would directly enable those girls to stay in school and improve their academic performance. Parents’ increased income could cover costs, while their enhanced sense of the value of education would ensure they invested more money, time and energy into it.

Yeshe was born in rural Oromia and has had a difficult life. She missed out on school, was married and divorced before she was 18, and has spent her adult life struggling to raise three children with meager earnings from very hard work. Her two sons are now grown up graduates, doing fine thanks to the education she insisted on providing them. She now lives in a medium sized town with her daughter Firegenet who is on the verge of Grade 9. Yeshe is an example of a mother who fully appreciated the value of education, but needed a little help to put this into practice.

When Yeshe tells her story, she explains almost every bad moment and lost opportunity as being a result of her not having an education. It may be that completing school would not have protected her from all those hardships, but her philosophy that a lack of education made her own life difficult certainly explains why she is so adamant about the education of Firegenet: *“When I was a child I always wanted to go to school. I actually went very briefly, but my parents took me out so I could look after the animals. I remember asking if I could go to school and them saying to me, ‘Come on, a girl who is sent to school will just have a baby and nothing else’. That was the attitude in those days, that if you send a girl to school the only thing she’ll do is have a child with a boy there, not even get married in the traditional way. So I didn’t go, and then I got married at 13.”*

"I don't even remember why my husband and I divorced, it was years and years ago and we just went separate ways. I think if I'd been educated and my husband had been educated, we'd both have made better decisions. As it was we just left behind everything we owned and tried to start again. We didn't know how to manage anything, from our marriage to our property to anything. If we were educated we might have considered the advantages and disadvantages of what we were doing. We know each other today and we both regret the way we handled things then, without knowing any better.

"After I divorced I moved to this place. I was new here and I knew no one. Life was so hard, I seriously wanted to commit suicide. I think God intervened because we were ok. But at the time I just kept thinking that if I'd only been educated, I would not be wanting to commit suicide, I would have known how to struggle and how to survive.

"Anyway I settled here, made a very small living, and had this beautiful daughter."

As if unsure if her message was clear enough, Yeshi leans over the coffee ceremony she is performing and states it as clearly as she can. It is her theory of the value of education, shaped by what she has witnessed or regretted:

"I am not educated and I'm like this. I don't want my daughter to be like me. If she stays in education she can choose the right people in life, and avoid the ones who might influence her in a bad way.

"And she will have knowledge. If you are educated you will have knowledge, and you will choose what's best for you. It is more important than money. Let me give you an example. There is a family in this neighbourhood who are well off, they have land selling sugar cane. But their daughters didn't want to go to school, they just played in the neighbourhood. They were young but they both ended up having babies with boys in the neighbourhood, and by that time it was too late for them to go to school. It shows that being educated helps you make better choices.

"Firegenet is going to make better choices. And she will work hard and be in a better position than me. I've seen a lot in life and it was very hard for me. A mother wants her daughter to reach somewhere better. I know that a person who is educated sees the light, not the darkness."

In pursuit of Firegenet's education, Yeshi has done whatever she could to earn money. She used to go around people's houses and make injera for them, getting a very small amount of money from each one. Then Firegenet became a CHADET beneficiary and started being supported with her schooling. Recognising her struggle, the GEC Committee recommended that Yeshi become part of a community self-help and savings group which would ultimately provide a business loan for participants. Not everyone is able to save regularly and be part of a group that meets often and regulates its members with rules and even punishments for not meeting savings targets. Unsurprisingly Yeshi devoted herself to it, met her targets, and is now seeing the rewards:

"It was very hard to save anything when my income was so little, but at the end of a full year of saving I could take a loan. I bought wholesale bags of cereals - wheat, teff and other grains - to sell in the market. Every day except Sunday I sell in the market. Now I'm doing well, and with God's will I have plans to change my life and make sure my daughter's is safe too.

"I am still in the savings group. We meet every Sunday afternoon to talk about saving money, and how to change our daughter's lives as well as our own. The CHADET community worker is there with us talking about saving and girls education. Every time we meet we feel we are changing each other a little by advising each other on saving money and on our lives and our daughter's education."

Yeshi is a mother with a humbling devotion to her child. She wants to support her and she also wants to protect her, for there are many threats that girls like Firegenet face. Sexual violence against girls is all too common, which means girls need to be aware and parents need to be vigilant: *"I tell*

my daughter that the world is not easy for girls, that boys and men can be a problem and might even try to abduct her. I advise her to take care, and to tell me anything.

“There was a time when a boy in the area was bothering her. He said if she wouldn’t be with him he’d kill her. It was scary for Firegenet but I spoke to the boy’s parents and they put a stop to it. Until today, thank God, she has stayed safe.

“I am divorced and uneducated so I can advise her about the risks of marriage and the importance of education. I tell her that these days, it’s so hard to trust people, and the main thing is to concentrate on your education and work hard at that.”

This mother’s love is well reciprocated by all her children. Firegenet works with her in the market when she can, and they all know that she sacrificed a lot to keep them in school. “My children always say to me, ‘You’re not educated but you educated us’, says Yeshe with quiet pride. Added to that, she feels she is gaining a knowledge and confidence herself, through her daughter’s education:

“My daughter is in school and she’s teaching me things. Recently she wanted to go to a town on the border with Kenya where my oldest son lives with his wife and child. It is two days travel and I was afraid to go, but my daughter was determined and insisted. I was afraid to stay in a hotel but she said we must, and we did. She is young but she knows what to do and she is right about things. She is teaching me.”

Firegenet has also helped her mother learn to sign her name, which she does with careful precision as if her whole self belongs in that mark. Proud of it, she explains why it means so much, again pointing out that education is a matter of identity and not just jobs and money:

“I know that many girls will leave school and not become doctors. They might just stay in rural, farming areas. But their education is still important. At least they have knowledge. At least they’re not going to use their fingers to sign.

“Because do you know, it is such a shame to use your finger for a signature. I normally have to use my finger but with Firegenet I am teaching myself to write my initials. Recently I went to a kebele where I had to sign something. I wanted to try to sign my initials but my hand started shaking. The lady said, ‘Are you alright?’ and I replied that I was sick and that was why my hand was shaking.

“I feel ashamed of not having my own signature and having to use my finger. If you’re educated, at least you can sign your name.”

The next steps for Yeshe are to keep working, keep saving, and keep her daughter in school. She hopes to expand her market business, she dreams of one day building them their own house, and she is in no doubt that it is all for her daughter: *“I work hard like this for her. I burn like this for her. What else do I have to work for? I work hard every day to make sure she can be educated and have a better life. Firegenet knows this, but sometimes I say to her, ‘Stay in school and be a good girl, because my knee melts for you’”.*

In supporting Yeshe’s grain stall and providing school materials and tutorials to her daughter, CHADET fuelled an already intense passion for girl’s schooling. To Yeshe, the intervention was one more piece of evidence in support of her theory about the power of education:

“The help we are receiving now is because of educated people, since people working for CHADET are educated. What we have now and how we changed our lives is because of them, because they transferred the assets to us. Now we are doing well.

“When people are educated, they change everything. The country will improve so much when more girls of this generation are educated.”

Little by little: How counselling deals with the most difficult of cases

An important component of the Girls' Education Challenge is provision of professional counselling to girls whose education has been threatened by very grave incidents such as escaping a marriage, suffering abuse while migrating alone for work, or being raped. This is because returning to class is important and doing well in school provides confidence, but those things may not solve underlying psychosocial issues affecting those girls. On a professional level, consistent counselling and advice is often required. And on a human level, such girls typically need something much more simple, yet often denied them: someone to trust, someone who cares for them. CHADET's counsellors are trained to build up a professional and personal relationship with these girls, sticking to them while they process and recover from what has happened, enabling them to move on with their life and focus on getting an education.

Fatuma is a professional psychologist and counsellor who trains and supports focal teachers in 15 schools in Amhara to provide effective and relevant advice, plus counsels extreme cases herself. Focal teachers identify girls who should receive professional counselling from Fatuma, and there are around 20 such girls at present. Fatuma has been in her position for two years. She explains her job and how it can be both rewarding and very challenging:

"The counselling I give girls is about relieving their stress and making them feel they can take choices and express what they want in life. We talk about the different options they face and the possible consequences of each, so that over time they can be stronger at making good choices and getting what they want from life."

"Counselling doesn't work in one session. The change is gradual, it may take a year for a girl to go from anxious and stressed to being more calm and in control of her life. But it's very satisfying to do this work, to see improvements in a girl who you have been counselling for a long time after something like escaping a marriage or being abused in another way."

"It is difficult too. There are sad cases, like a girl we thought we had rescued from being married who then dropped out of school because her parents had managed to successfully marry her to someone else. Or Hamelmal, who was raped and still suffers a lot of difficulty at home and at school."

Indeed, one of the most challenging cases for Fatuma is Hamelmal, a twelve-year old girl with learning difficulties and a fairly unsupportive family whose life got even harder when she was raped by a man who lured her from her mother's market stall with 20 Birr and then threatened her with a knife. He told her he would kill her if she told anyone, but her older sister found out and broadcast it



cruelly at school a few days later. Hamelmal was already shy and, with a learning difficulty no one could cater for, doing very badly at school. She had kept to herself and been repeating Grade 1 for three years in that school, and for two years in another school before that. After this incident she left school to wander in town, steering clear of home because her mother would force her to sell things in the market she now feared. Her focal teacher called Fatuma and asked for help.

Fatuma remembers how nervous she was when she got the call, a young psychologist with good training but not yet much experience. It sounded overwhelming, and in her first meeting with Hamelmal the girl didn't speak a word. But Fatuma stuck with her. During more than a year of regular counselling, usually at school, she provided steady, heartfelt care. Unlike almost everyone else in the young girl's life, she earned her absolute trust. After more than a year, Fatuma remembers the challenging journey:

"It's the hardest case I've ever had to deal with. She didn't talk to me at first and she didn't even show the pain or tears I had expected, it was as if she was beyond pain. I used to see Hamelmal twice a week, now I see her less frequently but she still needs to see me a lot and I expect that to continue.

"At first it was really hard to support her. She wouldn't speak. And she definitely wouldn't speak around her parents, it is not a happy house for her and she sometimes gets aggressive there out of frustration.

"Now she trusts me. She really wants someone to trust. And now that she trusts me she tells me everything! All about the family, all about school, everything!"

We went to meet Hamelmal at her school, a hive of activity that promises 'Education For All!' in the arch over its gate. The little girl comes speeding into her focal teacher's office, dressed in a neat grey skirt and blouse with tightly cropped hair. Flinging herself and a small rucksack onto the wooden bench, as close as possible to Fatuma, she looks around the room with enormous wide eyes, curling herself out of nervousness at seeing people she doesn't know. 'Just look at me, and tell me', coaxes Fatuma with a gentle hand around the little girl's shoulders. And so she talks about what she's learnt that day, and shows her exercise books with their determined scrawls in English and Amharic and red pen marks of correction.

We ask her how she is doing in class, and she says proudly that she is not at the bottom because in the recent test she scored higher than two students. She has been attending tutorials since the rape incident, and they are working. Hamelmal has a beaming smile that turns on like a light with something as simple as being praised for being a good girl who is improving in writing and reading, and taking care of herself. She is blossoming under the care and attention she deserves. When we comment that Fatuma must be a very good friend to her and she replies simply, "I love Fatuma".

When Hamelmal returns to the playground, Fatuma and the focal teacher go over the case. The focal teacher is a large and reassuring woman with decades of experience teaching and caring for girls. She is clearly concerned when she relates the particular and challenging case of Hamelmal:

"Hamelmal always used to keep to herself and had trouble communicating with other students. After we knew she'd been raped, I could see that she was very stressed and not well. She started wandering in the streets during the day instead of coming to school, and she didn't seem to care what happened to her. That is why we contacted Fatuma. In the year since then, Fatuma has played an amazing role and spent a lot of time with her. Slowly we saw positive change: she cares more what she looks like, takes care of herself, and expresses herself more. She is also doing better in class. With her learning difficulties she always struggled at school. Going through what she suffered, it got worse for a time. Now, because of tutorials, she has improved a lot. She is more confident. She can write quite well now, which is a big improvement, and one that makes her very happy."

Unfortunately Hamelmal's family are not as supportive as they could be. Her mother is a busy woman with six children and a new grandchild to take care of in one small room, so it is perhaps understandable that this particular child is proving too much for her. But her frustration about Hamelmal's lack of progress in school and the many problems she faces is clearly painful for Fatuma to hear. Sitting in her tiny and dark room, the rather fierce woman declares, "There have been a lot of problems with this girl, and I don't know what her problem is with school but she is far behind others her age". Fatuma tries to ensure Hamelmal doesn't hear by asking her to bring her schoolbag so she can fix its broken zip. She is aware that these parents are frustrated that their daughter is not supporting them the way they expect – for example by working in the market – but sees that this makes Hamelmal unhappy and sometimes aggressive. She plans to support Hamelmal for the long term, counselling and caring for her as best she can so that she can do well in school and stay safe. And she will make regular visits to the parent too, coaxing them over time to support the positive changes that are happening in Hamelmal's life.

Watching other children singing in class and jumping around in playground games, it seems so easy for them and so difficult for Hamelmal. For now she does have two guardian angels, Fatuma and her focal teacher, made more important because of the challenges she faces at home, at school, and in the wider environment. And her progress in school is vital both psychologically and in terms of preparing her for a self-reliant future. The tutorials are working, but recognising their limits for a girl like Hamelmal, and others besides, CHADET have recently agreed a partnership with an NGO specialised in educational support for children with learning difficulties. Through the patient, specialised care that will provide for individual students, Hamelmal and others can grow in their education. And little by little, combined with counselling where necessary, they should have the resources to overcome challenges and live their lives confidently and at their own pace.

4. I Choose Life, Kenya

Access to sanitary towels: Mary's story (student)

Mary is one of the 10,170 marginalised girls that the Jielimishe GEC Project targets to improve their life chances through education. She lives in a village in Imenti North, Meru County with her parents, two brothers and a sister-in-law. The area is predominantly agricultural, which relies on income from cash crops such as coffee, small tea plantations and food crops such as bananas, arrow roots and various vegetables. Despite the rich agricultural setting of the region, most people live in poverty and cannot adequately afford their basic needs. Mary's parents are both peasant farmers whose income is less than Kshs.10,000 (USD 100) a month, which is insufficient to meet the basic family needs, leave alone pay school fees. The family lives in a compound made up of three semi-permanent wooden houses.

The challenge

Mary says that she repeated Class 6 as her menstrual periods began in 2012. At that time she could neither afford nor access sanitary towels for herself. "I could not concentrate in class; I tied a sweater around my waist to cover my dress. I felt shame and I preferred missing school."

When asked if she approached her mother during her periods, she replied by saying that she felt shy to do so. During her periods, she would borrow pads from her sister-in-law, who at times did not have sufficient for herself. In such times she opted to spend the whole day in bed, "I would only think of what was happening to me throughout as I lay in bed".

When asked why she did not want to go to school, she would tell her mother that she feared being taunted by fellow pupils and avoided explaining herself further. To keep clean, she would change her clothes often but according to her, "When all the clean clothes got soiled, the only solution left for me was to just sit still without having any towel in place".

Academically, Mary's performance has been consistent throughout: she has always been a top performing student. But the performance dropped drastically when she joined Class 6 six for the first time in 2012. This coincided with the onset of her menstrual periods which led to irregular school attendance coupled with low self-esteem. Mary's story confirms the study that was conducted by Jielimishe GEC project where 12% of the girls interviewed reported a lack of sanitary towels to be the second leading cause of absenteeism and/or drop out for girls, after poverty. Yet only 36% of secondary schools provide the towels.

The change

Jielimishe GEC Project was a big refuge for girls like Mary. She informed us that since JGEC began the sanitary towels support in her school, she has been receiving sanitary towels. Her life then took a dramatic change for the better.

"I can now concentrate in class, I find no reason to miss classes during my periods. I can stand in front of my classmates and solve a math problem. I have developed a love for soccer and I can do all of this without thinking of my period when they arrive".

"Mary attends school all through the month, including the days she is on her periods" added her mother. Her confidence has grown and her self-esteem has been boosted.

Participation in sports

A promising soccer player, Mary informed us that she just changes into her games kit, squares it out at the field and enjoys dribbling against her opponents, especially the boys. "I have developed a love for soccer, and I can do all of this without thinking of my periods when they arrive," she confidently told us.

Improved self-confidence

Her mother says that Mary's self-esteem has been boosted, compared to the days she would spend in bed in low moods. Mary has taken upon herself to give talks to fellow students and she also engages in peer counselling. She has become a favourite of the village's young children, who often mill around her every time she is around her home. She has also expressed her passion in children's Christian ministry: she has attended a camp to become a Sunday school teacher.

Improved class performance

Mary's mother testifies that this programme is responsible for this improvement. Provision of the towels, counselling and training offered and constant assurance from her mother transformed Mary from sleeping her periods away, into an active school pupil. In her last test, she scored 333 out of 500, emerging the top in her class. Once ranked 10th, with 271 out of 500, she is now the best student in her class.

Her future dreams

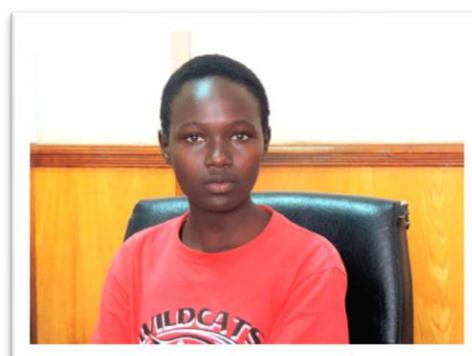
Mary would like to join Starehe Girls' Center when she completes her primary school education. She wishes to be a teacher when she grows up so that she can inspire and educate children. She also has a passion for computing and she can't wait to start learning using the laptops donated to her school by Jielimishe GEC Project.

According to Mary's teacher, the majority of the adolescent girls in the school miss between three and four days in a month, during which they are experiencing their monthly periods. Before the introduction of Jielimishe GEC project, the school reported irregular attendance and/or absenteeism of up to 102 girls on a monthly basis. But with provision of sanitary towels the school has observed improved attendance as indicated by school registers.

A young Turkana girl beat odds to ascend closer to her dream

As she scripted down her grades before her sponsor, no one could believe how excellently she had performed or that she was the same girl who looked void of hope for education some three months ago. Now she was glowing, her head high, and her vision clear; full of hopes of becoming the next greatest journalist in the country.

At 14 years, Cheboiboi had gone through what she describes as 'abnormal life for a girl child'. A first born in a humble family of four, she has been very instrumental in fending for her younger siblings despite having both parents. Living in a tiny village in Laikipia West, both her parents are unemployed. They would crush boulders to make concrete, out of which they would sell and make a living. To her, they lived one day at a time. She would therefore join her parents in a bid to make more for the family.



Many are the times they would go hungry for a day or two and would survive the nights on drinking water; which was also not clean. This would force her to go to school with an empty stomach. Often, she would be sent home for as little as KES 470 primary school levies after which she would join her parents in crushing stones. School uniform was also a problem to her.

On 9 May 2014, during Jielimishe GEC Baseline Dissemination held at Catholic Church, she happened to be among the few Class 8 girls asked to discuss and present on the challenges facing the girls in pursuit of education. When all her friends were hesitant, she stood to share on their discussion. *“I had three points”, she recalls, “scholarship for the girls, electricity for the school and equal treatment of boys and girls”.* Little did she know that these ‘three points’ would mark her turning point.

Engineer Mike Mutungi, CEO of I Choose Life- Africa and Director of Jielimishe GEC project was extremely moved by how strongly the girl had put her case forth. He decided to challenge her to attain more than 300 points in her KCPE and he would sponsor her to secondary school. Little did he know that the girl actually thrives on challenges.

“He reignited my last embers for education”, Cheboiboi paused, “I knew that my father was, in every way, not going to be able to support my secondary education. To fill a lorry that goes for KES 5,000, we would have to crush the boulders for 6 months without break. Then the KES 5,000 would go to fees or buying food for the family!”

Clearly, to her, the challenge was a ‘do or die.’ The girl was motivated to work extra hard, she would report to school earlier than others and at times leave late. She would be all over her teachers for assistance. True to her effort, after KCPE, she scored 306 marks out of a possible 500 marks.

She was excited but admits *“...these were not my marks [sic], at time I used to go to school hungry. I would have scored over 350 marks.”*



The CEO was true to his word. During a corporate mentorship event at Rumuruti targeting other girls like her, he awarded Cheboiboi her scholarship which facilitated her enrolment to Loise Girls Nanyuki, a county school in Laikipia County. Not forgetting her background, Cheboiboi knew she was in the school for a purpose; to get education and free her family from cycles of poverty.

Life for her is conducive. She has plenty of time to study as opposed to walking long distances; a case that characterised her primary schooling. According to her *...“I study hard, I always ensure that I listen to the teacher keenly and read more from the text books. I always seek clarification whenever I don’t understand because I know the teachers are willing to help. I want to get excellent grades so that my sponsor can be motivated to fund my university education.”*

Asked what she’d want to be after her studies, Cheboiboi asserts that she would want to be a journalist so that she can use the media to empower more girls in her community and the world at large. To her, nothing will come into her way of realising this dream. This is quite evident from the first term results where she posted a clean ‘A’ of 82.25 points. Her worst score was an A- out of 8 subjects! In CRE, she got 99%.



As I listen to her affirm that she will indeed make a change in her community, I could not help but wonder how many girls out there, just like her, would want someone to come their way and help them utilise their potential to change their the community.

Cheboiboi is a living example of girls that the Jielimishe GEC project is supporting to complete the education life cycle and improve their life chances. If more are supported, then the life chances of such girls will surely be increased.

A second chance to revive an almost lost dream

In October, 2014 the Laikipia County Governor made an unexpected public announcement in regard to education for girls that made many heads turn. The announcement that parents who take their daughters through school in Laikipia County would be rewarded with cattle left many wondering what he aimed to achieve.

Governor Joshua Irungu said early marriages among pastoral communities denied girls their right to education. *“We are ready to give the incentive as a way of fighting child marriages. If we have to give cattle to fathers to stop them from marrying off their young daughters, then we might as well start doing just that.”* This announcement comes as a confirmation that a lack of support for education for girls is a huge contributor to child marriage in this county. This reduces transition in schools as well as performance of girls in school.

A research conducted by I Choose Life Africa a non-government organisation in Laikipia indicated that 48% of parents reported that they perceived that the community did not provide support for girls’ education. However this is bound to change. Efforts by Jielimishe GEC project being implemented in the county seem to be yielding fruits. The project that sensitises the community on the importance of girls’ education, besides other innovative interventions, has seen many parents come out to support their daughters to attend, stay in school and learn.

On 10 February 2015 in Ilpolei Secondary School, a young girl in Form 3 who had dropped out of school because of pregnancy was brought back to school by her mother who said to the principal *“Nimeleta msichana yako” (I have brought your girl).”*

Carrying a baby on her back, the mother went on to explain that her daughter had given birth and she was ready to take care of the child so that she can continue with her studies. *“Her life is dependent on her education”*, said the mother, who strongly argued that retrogressive cultural practices have denied girls in the region an opportunity to realise their dreams. This happened about a month after the project had launched a campaign to sensitise the community on the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) re-entry policy.

The policy states that girls who drop out of school should be followed up and support to re-enter to continue with their education, something that most parents from this region never thought of. Once a girl gets pregnant and delivers she is considered a mother and not fit for school. She ends up seeing her dream slip away, courtesy of her newly acquired status; a young mother.

The re-entry policy advocates that every girl who drops out of school because of pregnancy should be supported to return to school after delivery. It goes on to highlight that the vacancy of the girl in the school should be maintained until that time she is ready. In the event that she feels she wants to re-enrol in a different school, she should be supported to do so.

The project which seeks to support at least 500 girls, who have previously dropped out of school because of pregnancy and other reasons, to go back to school has currently supported 133 girls in Laikipia among whom 40 are young mothers identified through community structures and schools.

The young mother Edith benefitted from a mother who embraced the re-entry policy after Jielimishe GEC's community sensitisation to re-enrol back to school. What a second chance for her.

What a responsive mother she has who has lit her candle once again and granted her the opportunity to live her dream. Mayani vowed to work even harder to be a true testimony and model to other families. She vowed to be the story of change in her community and motivate more families support girls like her, by giving them a second chance to realise their dreams.

Mary's story

Mary is one of the 10,050 marginalised girls that Jielimishe GEC project targets, to improve their life chances through education. She lives in Ng'onyi village in Imenti North, Meru County with her parents, two brothers and a sister-in-law. The area is a predominantly an agricultural region, which relies on income from cash crops such as coffee, small tea plantations and food crops such as bananas, arrow roots and various vegetables. Despite the rich agricultural setting of the region, most people in are living in poverty and cannot adequately afford the basic needs.



Mary's parents are both peasant farmers whose income is less than Kshs.10,000 (USD 100) a month, which is insufficient to meet the basic family needs, let alone pay school fees. The family lives in a compound made up of three semi-permanent wooden houses.

Mary says that she repeated Class 6 because her menstrual periods began in 2012. At that time she could neither afford nor access sanitary towels for herself. *"I could not concentrate in class; I tied a sweater around my waist to cover my dress. I felt shame and I preferred missing school,"* she began. When asked if she approached her mother during her periods, she replied by saying that she felt shy to do so. During her periods, she would borrow pads from her sister-in-law, who at times did not have sufficient for herself. In such times she opted to spend the whole day in bed. *"I would only think of what was happening to me throughout as I lay in bed,"* she pointed out further. When asked why she did not want to go to school, she would tell her mother that she feared being taunted by fellow pupils, and she avoided explaining herself further. To keep clean, she would change her clothes often but according to her *"when all the clean clothes got soiled, the only solution left for me was to just sit still without having any towel in place,"*

Academically, Mary's performance has been consistent throughout: she has always been a top performing student. But the performance dropped drastically when she joined Class 6 for the first time in 2012. This coincided with the onset of her menstrual periods which led to irregular school attendance, coupled with low self-esteem.

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"I can now concentrate in class. I find no reason to miss classes during my periods. I can stand in front of my classmates and solve a math problem. I have developed a love for soccer and I can do all of this without thinking of my period when they arrive," she confidently told us. Mary attends school all through the month, including the days she is on her periods, added her mother. Her confidence has grown and self-esteem boosted.

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Mary's mother testifies that this programme is responsible for this improvement. Provision of the towels, counselling and training offered and constant assurance from her mother transformed Mary from sleeping her periods away, into an active school pupil. In her last test, she scored 333 out of 500, emerging the top in her class. Once ranked 10th, with 271 out of 500, she is now the best student in her class. This affirms Jielimishe's value on sanitary towels as the simple route to keeping girls in school and improving their learning.

According to the school registers, majority of the adolescent girls in the school miss between 3-4 days in a month, during which they are experiencing their monthly periods. Before the introduction of Jielimishe GEC project, the school reported irregular attendance and/or absenteeism of up to 102 girls on a monthly basis. But with provision of sanitary towels the school has observed improved attendance as indicated by school registers.

Mary would like to join Starehe Girls' Center when she completes her primary school education. She wishes to be a teacher when she grows up so that she can inspire and educate children. She also has a passion for computing and she can't wait to start learning using the laptops donated to her school by Jielimishe GEC project.

Helping households support their children's education

Musa's story as a beneficiary of the Jielimishe economic empowerment support in Dagara.

Musa says, *"I was born in Molo district before migrating to Laikipia County, Dagara area where I now live. This was after 2007 general election violence. I am a married father of 10 children, In the 2007 violence, I lost some of my relatives and I travelled to Dagara-Laikipia over several days and night using a donkey. It was really sad and painful.*

"Having escaped the post-election violence, we were refugees in Dagara until a year ago when the government resettled us and other 500 other families. It was hard for me to feed my family and I depended on relief food and other well-wishers for survival. There were no schools in the area we were settled in. We started our own school to enable our children continue with their education. The school has poor and inadequate infrastructure; wooden walls with numerous openings exposing students to cold and earthen floors.

“The high poverty levels among the parents has been a huge contributor to the lack of improvement to the school infrastructure. 80 per cent of the parents are recently resettled by the government and earning an average income of KES 2500 per month. This makes it difficult for them to support school improvement and educate their children - the focus is to put food on the table.

“It was during this period of settlement when we met with Jielimishe GEC project who were talking to the community about the importance of girls’ education and supporting girls who had dropped out to re-enter school. We shared our challenges and they agreed to support us in agricultural farming. The region experiences a semi-arid to arid climate thus presenting challenges to the farming of maize and beans – a tradition here.

“The Jielimishe GEC Project enrolled us into their programme and trained us on entrepreneurship, farming as a business, team work, animal husbandry, record keeping and SACCO formation. The training was really eye-opening for me. I started poultry farming and it has helped me support my three children in secondary school. Every month I make a profit of KES 6000 from chicken selling and with integration of crop and animal farming am able to feed my family and support their education”

The project also trained us on sunflower farming, a drought resistant crop that survives climates with inadequate rain. Through this training I was able to plant sunflower for the first and drop maize which had yielded so little in previous years. The project supported us with seeds and fertilizers as we ventured into this kind of farming first done in our area by us. The team provided ongoing supportive supervision on pest and disease management.



“I now see myself a competent sunflower farmer through this continued support. Despite sporadic and unreliable rains am certain that I will get a good harvest out of my sunflower. In this quarter acre piece am sure of KES 6,000 profit.



“Jielimishe GEC aims to increase our incomes to KES 10,000 per month. The good thing about our sunflower farming is that we do not have to worry about the market because Jielimishe sorted this out with Bidco. We are happy farmers since we have been helped with contract farming. Our worry now is production since the market is readily available.

“Even with most other crops drying due to scant rains, the sunflower farmers in Dagara can smile knowing that from now onwards there life shall be different due to contract farming as a courtesy of Jielimishe GEC.”

Don't dream: Do it!

Caroline is a Class 8 pupil at the KK Tharaine primary school. She has an amazing passion for education, great ambition and she is working hard towards fulfilling her dream. She says, *“I don't wish just to dream but to do it.”*

“Education is the process of acquiring knowledge. At times this process may be encountered by many other challenges which sometimes the learner has to put up with to achieve her desired goals. It’s not our background that determines who we become in future but how well we turn around opportunities given to us particularly in education. All of us can achieve our education goals.” These were inspirational words from Principal Kaaga Girls High school as she narrated her education journey to girls from KK. Tharaine and Mwiramwanki Primary School.

Caroline was among the girls who visited Kaaga Girls High school for an exchange and learning visit. The visit was geared towards giving girls an exposure to learn, motivate and inspire them to join centres of academic excellences.

Kaaga Girls is among the top performing schools within the County. The school has been an academic path for many women in top leadership in Kenya today

Caroline is a first born girl in a family of four siblings. Both of her parents struggle through odd jobs to support the family. Despite her ‘humble beginning’ Caroline has been able to retain a cool personality which appreciates all. She does not judge her peers and takes time to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. She likes to encourage them to be thankful in life. She is a class prefect and a member of Aflatoun club. Her academic performance is above average with a score of 300 marks out of 500.

Caroline shared her experience; after the exchange visit with Jielimishe team. She is a girl whom you would notice in a crowd. She asks questions and her leadership qualities are noticeable. She is enthusiastic within her peers.

In her experience she wrote, *“I would like to become a renowned lawyer. I admired the girls at Kaaga and their confidence moved me. I met two girls who studied in our school (KK Tharaine) and this made me believe I have no excuse of not working hard. I know my teachers are committed and dedicated and besides my background challenges I have to work hard. I know it is not easy but it is something achievable; education will liberate and give me a stable future in life.*

“I believe I can attain better results, I am putting every effort to see that I achieve my career dream of becoming a lawyer. I wish to remain focused and I try not to listen to external voices. I believe my dream defines my purpose and I have to work hard in my education I have my target for my upcoming exam K.C.P.E (Kenya primary education examination) which is 360 marks. I have to build my future.”

Launch of the Alumni and Alumnae Association: Mucuune Primary School

The long awaited day was finally here. The teachers and pupils of Mucuune Primary School were going to meet the old boys and girls of the school. The day would mark a turnaround for the school.

The old boys and girls were coming to pay homage to the school they once attended; the school that shaped them into what they are today. People from all walks of life graced the occasion and made their day a success. Amongst the invited guests was the women’s representative in Meru county, Hon. Florence Kajuju. The boys and girls met some of the renowned



personalities who had gone through their school. The aim of the meeting was to form an alumni and alumnae association that would help the mentorship of the pupils in the school as well as for infrastructure development.

A baseline study carried out by Jelimishe GEC in Meru County had revealed that 72 per cent of learners felt that mentoring is highly effective in motivating and inspires them to attend and stay in school. It is on this basis that the school in partnership with Jielimishe GEC decided to reach out to the old boys and girls for mentorship. The school has been in existence since 1949 and had produced professionals in all walks of life. These people formed a large untapped pool of mentors for the school.

Old girls and boys converged at the institution to be part of the team. In attendance were local leaders, teachers, businessmen and other professionals from all walks of life, who had travelled from as far as Nairobi to give back to the community in which they had grown. Their focus was to give back to the community that they benefitted from.

“We all went through this school and it contributed greatly to shaping us into what we are today”, one of them proudly testified.

The parents had also gathered in the school for this occasion.

In addition to inaugurating the association, the day was also set aside for rewarding good performance. The school had a mean score of 279.2 in 2014 KCPE. This has been a steady rise over the years, a sign of the hard work put in by the teachers and pupils of the school.

Girls entertained the guests with song and dance. The boys too were not left behind, though the girls stole the show. The highlight was having the pupils in the integrated special unit join in the song and dance. They touched the hearts of the crowd.

Jielimishe GEC project supported the school with a mentorship guide developed for marginalised communities. The guide, which is being approved by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), is meant to guide an all year round mentorship programme, strengthen the association and guide through mentorship.

The Meru County women representative, Hon Florence Kajuju, an old girl of the school could not attend the function but her representative acknowledged her role as Patron of the association. She donated a carton of books for Classes 3, 7 and 8 social ethics as well as four cartons of sanitary towels. She promised to visit the school in the near future. She pledged to consider the school for support once the newly approved KSh40 million county package in her docket was released. The area MP Hon. Kariithi was also sent a donation of books and pledged to allocate CDF funds for construction of a dining hall. The Alumni contributed a total of Ksh20, 000 for infrastructure upgrading.



No dream is too BIG!!

Young girls dream to visit the City through Aflatoun Programme

The school bell rings. The time is 4pm. This can only mean one thing - the day's lessons have ended and it's time to go home. Well, that is not the case for 30 girls and boys from KK Tharaine primary school. To them it's the best moment of the day - time for their Aflatoun club activities. Judy and Hassan the Aflatoun club leaders take the lead. They pick the Aflatoun scarfs and banner and head to their club's trees nursery bed.

Posing with their bright scarfs, they sing the Aflatoun song, evaluate their previous day's work, deliberate on what needs to be done for that moment and distribute roles. The boys grab the watering cans and head to fetch water a few meters away from the only water source in the school. They embark on the seedbed and start uprooting the weeds as others pick out the dead plants and replace with fresh ones. They have great plans even as they tend to their nursery including plan sprinkling some fertilizer to provide more nutrients to the seedlings. Soon the boys come hurrying with jerry cans full of water.



As I watch these young students work, their faces are full of glitter. A glow that interprets vision, dreams and ambition to reach for that seemingly attainable goal. Only the ants can match up. The desire to grow with an entrepreneur spirit and financial skills focused towards supporting education, addressing community problems and an opportunity to travel are these Aflatouns' drive.

Aflatoun's programme contains both social and financial themes. Children learn about themselves, child rights, saving, basic financial concepts, and enterprise. Aflatoun puts children at the centre of their learning process and engages them with the world around them. By doing so, Aflatoun believes that the social and

financial lessons that they receive will be instilled within them in the longest time to come.

The club has 2000 gravellier tree seedlings on their seedbed. The seedlings were uprooted from their homes by the club members and later transferred to the polythene papers which were purchased at a cost of Kshs. 250 only. The seedbed was constructed using locally available materials in the school. In four months' time they will sell the seedlings between Kshs. 6 and Kshs. 10 giving them an average income of Kshs. 12,000. Through the Aflatoun programme rolled out by Jielimishe GEC project in the school, the girls have learned to systematically outline steps in achieving



their dreams. They have made a financial plan to save enough money so that they can visit the big city; Nairobi – Kenya’s capital city.

According to the Aflatoun Patron Elias Mbui....the club has given the students a sense of belonging, ownership and motivation to attend school. *“We do not call them for meetings, they take upon themselves to weed, water and replace the dead seedlings. As patrons we only offer supportive role.”*



Later I sit down with one 13 year old Lena, a Class 8 student and a member of the Aflatoun club. According to her, *“The club has helped me to be responsible and now I know how to save money. I get a few coins from my mum to buy “ngumus” (a fist size locally made pastry) and I plan to start saving this money. I will ask my brother to make a “potea” (locally made piggy bank) where I will start my savings. Once I have saved enough I would like to visit the Nairobi museum.”*

As I listen to her make a commitment on her future plans, only one thing crosses my mind, “Opportunity”. Lena was privileged for having the opportunity through Aflatoun club. It goes without saying, if girls are given an opportunity they capitalise on it and build ambitions that go beyond just making a living, but extend to making a life for themselves.

5. Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE), Nigeria

Reaching beyond my grasp: I can talk to the President now

Before enrolling in the ENGINE programme in Lagos, Abibat was very unhappy.

The 18-year-old mother of one believed that her life was over when she got pregnant at age 15. The unexpected pregnancy, coupled with some financial difficulties her family was going through, led her to drop out of school and join her mother in the meat selling business. She experienced a lot of stigma and felt ashamed.

Abibat wants to be a medical doctor so she can “*save lives and save communities.*” She believes she would have remained in school had she been able to join ENGINE earlier. Since participating in ENGINE, she has been able to save money and plan her finances properly. She also credits the programme for her increased self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem.



“Being bold today to talk in front of you is one of the most important things I have gained from ENGINE. My father is very strict, but he was surprised to see me speak up for myself today. Then, I did not know how to face a crowd but now I am fully comfortable to speak in public; I even gave a speech at my friend’s wedding. I can even talk to the President now.”

Abibat has increased confidence in her future, and she wants to set up a shop to expand her pastry business so she can save money more quickly for school. She credits ENGINE with a lot of success in her community as the girls are now more reliable and focused on their future; she hopes the project will continue so that more girls can participate.

In the meantime, she spends her spare time advising and counselling her younger ones and other girls in the community, drawing from her learning and experiences from participating in the project. She is passionate about the empowerment and education of girls and believes that ENGINE has done so much to restore their confidence. The improvement is so visible in those who participated in this phase that the younger girls in the community are gearing up to enrol in the next phase of the project.

And what would she say if she had the opportunity to speak to the President? *“He should please use the power; authority and constitution of Nigeria to make sure the Chibok girls are released. For his regime to be okay he needs to be prayerful and any aspect he finds himself, he should be grateful.”*

Daring to dream: Looking forward with confidence

When she first heard about ENGINE, 17-year-old Margaret from Iba community was not too enthusiastic. Due to financial constraints, she had been unable to sit for the last JAMB exams that would have enabled her to secure a place in any of Nigeria’s universities.

Margaret's dream was to enrol in training to be a radio show host, but her strict family background meant that she kept her ambitions hidden. Shy and withdrawn after avoiding sexual assault twice, Margaret preferred to spend her days indoors and believed that she was not smart enough to participate in ENGINE.

But with the encouragement of her neighbour, who introduced her to the project, and follow-up from ENGINE staff however, she is enjoying a lot of success because of ENGINE.

Since returning fully to the project, she has joined an ENGINE savings group and has saved N 5,000 (about \$25) from the weekly allowance she gets from her father. Her confidence levels have also improved tremendously. *"I have been able to improve in my confidence level... I am now able to stand in front of people and talk, present and even dramatise"*.

Margaret still nurtures her dreams of being a radio presenter and hopes that involvement in the ENGINE project would empower her to achieve that dream. She hopes to build up the savings she has accrued in the savings group within the next two years, and intends to also take up tailoring as a means to earn more money that will enable her enrol in the university. Within the next seven years, Margaret hopes to have graduated from the University and hopefully, wants to be a Nigerian ambassador.



She sees ENGINE as a very good platform for young girls and confirms that when she finally understood the concept of the project, she became very proud of her country.

"If there is this kind of programme here in Lagos State, and somebody says Nigeria is not growing, then there must be a problem somewhere. If we can start doing things in Nigeria like the way we have seen in ENGINE, then we have a very good future. I am very, very happy that something like this is going on in Nigeria".

Supporting family values: Local Imam supports girls to participate in ENGINE

“Our motivation for wanting to support these girls is because we can look at their future and see that it is going to be great and good.”



Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE) project works to improve the learning outcome and economic opportunities 18,000 adolescent girls in the Northern States of Kano, Kaduna, Federal Capital Territory and Lagos states.

In Somolu, Bariga, ENGINE’s learning centre co-ordinators and participants know they can always count on Alhaji Idris Adegoke, an Imam at the local mosque, for support.

Testimonies abound on how he is always ready to provide assistance to

the Learning Centre to ensure that the girls are motivated to participate. Whether the need is for a public address system, or to garner co-operation of the community, or to find ways to ensure that the ENGINE girls and learning space coordinators have a conducive atmosphere for their sessions, he is sure to meet that need.

“The support that we render to ENGINE, encourages the girls to be consistent in their training and when the girls know they have the support of the community, they will be focused and not allow themselves to be distracted.”

Alhaji Adegoke identifies three major influences in shaping how a girl thrives and grows up: her parents, her environment and her peer influence. For him, the simple solution to the challenges should be that parents and people in the environment should be enlightened with the word of God so that they can impart the right values to their children.

Once there is love in a family, and the peers and environment are conducive for learning, then the individual would also not be tempted to stray far from the path that is right for her.

As the community’s spiritual leader, he encourages parents to set good examples for their children to follow. He also encourages girls to take responsibility for living their lives in a way that would inspire others. He supports ENGINE because he believes the project aligns with his visions for his community. He is full of praise for the ENGINE project and its goals to build girls’ self-esteem, train them to be responsible and financially independent; and to encourage them to support their families and partners.

His greatest joy would be to see Somolu full of independent and confident young women, each contributing to change in the community.

Saving lives: Saving to support my community

Seventeen year old Dayyaba has always dreamt of being a doctor, but that dream was dashed when she was forced to drop out of school after her Junior Secondary School. She said all hope was lost when her parents informed her, of their inability to fund her education further.

Being the eldest daughter of four children, Dayyaba had to result to menial jobs to raise money and support her needy family. She took to hair styling and beautification of young girls and brides in her neighbourhood using henna, giving her an average monthly income of \$20.



Dayyaba was enrolled in the ENGINE project in October 2014, into a safe space in Rangaza community, Ungogo Local Government Area of Kano State, North West Nigeria. Five months into the project, Dayyaba appears more confident and has increased knowledge on a variety of topics including savings and personal hygiene.

Dayyaba joined a savings groups with some of her community members and was able to save the equivalent of \$1 weekly and eventually grew her savings to over \$20.

One fateful night, Dayyaba's neighbor Aisha Nuhu suddenly went into labor and with Aisha's husband out of town, there was no money to take her to the hospital which is mostly the case in Rangaza community. In the confusion, Dayyaba, ran home to pull out about \$12 from her savings to support Aisha's transport and delivery cost at the Primary health centre.

According to Aisha, *"...Dayyaba is a blessing to the community, may God keep her"*.

Dayyaba is now seen as a role model in Rangaza community. *"Dayyaba is very outspoken and courageous; she is one of the most active girls in the class and she leads in drama presentation on champion days"* said Binta Salisu, the learning space mentor for Rangaza.

Empowered to be self-reliant

Funmilayo popularly called Gold is a nineteen year old orphan battling the challenges of disability having lost her left arm to an infection. Gold lives with her father who is a clergy man and 6 siblings in Abesan community in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State. Due to the large family and small income as a clergy, Gold's father could not afford to further her education, hence her dropping out at secondary school.

With the sudden loss of her arm to a cancerous infection in 2004 and lack of financial resources, Gold became withdrawn and started isolating herself from family and friends; especially as other children teased her due to her disability.

Gold says *"...small children will always ask me where my hand went, and that makes me feel embarrassed me. I always think about my lost hand..."*



Within 5 months of her enrolment into the ENGINE programme, Gold has transformed to a confident and self-reliant young woman. According to Gold “...they taught us how to use little money to start our business, how to talk to our customers, how to save our money and how to manage the business so that the business will not crash.”

She said learning from the safe space activities motivated her to use about \$7 of her savings to start up a snack business which gives her a net profit of about \$1 weekly. Gold is saving from her income, with the hope of actualising her dream of

becoming a musician. She said “...I want to go to a music school, so I still save my gain to help me support myself ...

No longer business as usual

When Ayuba Markus was first transferred to the government secondary school Gonin Gora as its new Principal, he thought it would be business as usual and that meant a lot of challenges. Set in a bustling suburban settlement in Kaduna, the school would ask students who were late in paying their school fees to leave until they were able to pay. While some students were able to return (although they would be behind in their learning), the majority would not. Ayuba Markus saw other challenges keeping girls out of school as well including divorce, teen pregnancy, little value on education, and inadequate toilet facilities.

And then Educating Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE) project was introduced in September 2014 and the school enrolled as one of the learning centers.

“Before ENGINE was introduced,” he says, “we did not know our students that well, but we now get to have a closer understanding of the backgrounds and circumstances of the children. This enables us to find ways to tailor our educational activities to suit the child’s total needs.”

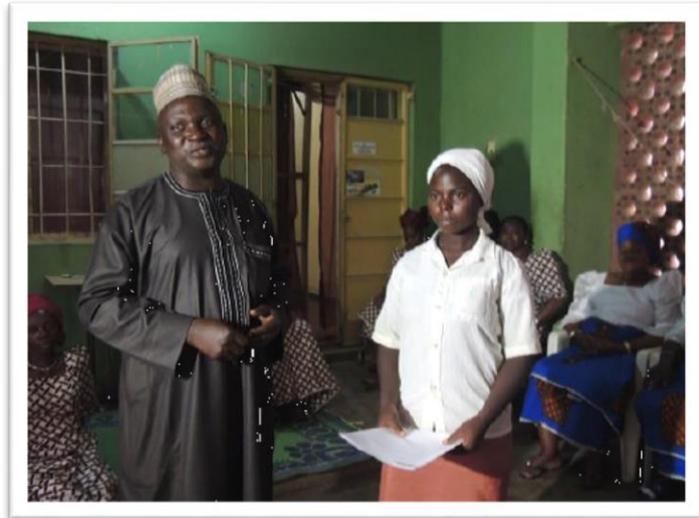
While following up on a girl who had dropped out of school, Ayuba Markus was moved to tears at the abject poverty he found the family in. He was shocked to discover that there were families still living in such conditions and that a considerable chunk of his students fell into those demographics.

With that picture in his mind, he now allows some very disadvantaged students to remain in school and, when possible, the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) contributes money to scholarships to those girls whose parents cannot afford to pay the fees. The 18-member Gonin Gora SBMC comprises artisans, teachers, professionals and parents. The SBMC ensures the school receives all the support it needs from them.

With a committed SBMC, Ayuba Markus confirms that their focus as learning coordinators is also beginning to change. Where they used to be more concerned about infrastructure prior to the introduction of the ENGINE program, they are now focused on the attitudinal change in the students.

The SBMC is working to make the school environment one that supports learning in all aspects. Recently, it had addressed the issue of students from other schools gaining access into the premises during breaks, which was distracting the students.

And with the co-operation of some development organisations, the SBMC was also able to reach (and implement) the decision to build separate toilet facilities for the girls. For now, these new toilets are still the local pit toilets, but the school remains hopeful that they would be able to upgrade to flush cisterns as soon as possible.



These improvements among others, has made it possible for the girls to remain in school, concentrate better, and improve their learning outcomes; girls' attendance is now higher than boys and the principal is optimistic that he will continue to witness these favorable changes.

Empowering girls through education

A father to eight girls and the Principal of the Government Secondary School Kugu—which is an ENGINE learning centre—Murtala Saleh Kugu has had first-hand experience in choosing between education and marriage for a girl. Torn between the pressure from his mother to marry his daughter who had just finished her secondary education and the value he placed on educating girls and empowering them for the future, Murtala struck a compromise by giving out his daughter in marriage, yet continuing to pay her school fees.

The choice between marriage and quality education is one which Murtala Kugu sees play out daily as the Community Development Committee (CDC) Chairman of Kugu community, a committee formed as a result of Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE) that oversees such issues as community security, the health and education of the community, with the aim to improve the learning outcome and economic opportunities for adolescent girls.

According to Murtala, many girls did not understand the value of education and saw marriage as their only option before ENGINE. Now, school enrolment is on the rise. *“ENGINE has brought life and light to the community,”* he says. Murtala attributes this change in girl enrolment statistics to female role models and the realisation that women can excel in their chosen professions.

In his capacity as the School Principal and the Chairman of the CDC, Murtala Saleh Kugu encourages girls to remain in school despite the challenges they face and the temptations to withdraw. He recently admitted two Fulani school girls whose parents refused to bear the cost of their education. Murtala Saleh Kugu is covering all associated expenses.





He continues to waive school fees for young girls whose families are unable to pay and then presents their cases for consideration to other members of the CDC who contribute money to cover waived fees or purchase uniforms for students who drop out because they cannot afford to replace their old, tattered uniforms.

The Kugu CDC continues to sensitise the community in order to encourage improved learning outcomes of the youth, especially marginalised adolescent girls, using the current ENGINE girls as laudable examples. So

far, that strategy has been successful with an almost 300% to 400% increase in enrolment by girls into junior and senior secondary schools, respectively. And now issues that were once channelled to the District Head are now handled by members of the CDC; recently members of the committee intervened to avert a threat of violence from the neighbouring community using dialogue after recent elections.

The sense of the CDC's commitment to the ENGINE project and the community ensures that girls have a safe learning environment. For Murtala, the real impact the ENGINE project has brought to the community is the paradigm shift on what girls can aspire to; and the need to explore and exploit the full potential of women as the key to steady community development. As Murtala puts it, *"Even Islam says: When you educate one woman, you educate a nation."*

Saving for a brighter future: Looking forward with hope

Each morning, 18-year-old Safiyatu says her prayers, helps her husband prepare for his work day and then tidies up the house. Some days, she attends Islamic education classes (Islamiyya); other days, she sits in front of her home with a tray of roasted tiger nuts and watches as people go by.

Safiyatu's formal education ended when her father died about six years ago and her grandmother found it difficult to send her to school. It still hurts her that she was unable to complete her education, become a nurse and support other young girls from her close-knit community in Dakace, Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

A few months ago, Safiya enrolled in ENGINE. *"It encourages young girls and teach us some valuable life skills that would help us in our development as individuals,"* she said.

Since enrolling, Safiya is applying what she learned in school along with new skills she is learning in ENGINE to her life. One of the gains from ENGINE has been the self-confidence to express herself in public and also offer peer education to her friends to help boost their confidence and encourage them to be bolder and braver in pursuing their dreams.

"ENGINE taught us how to speak in the presence of people, how to hold debates, and how to save and spend money. We also talk about gender issues and how to respect yourself as a woman, and determine how you want to be treated and addressed."

Safiya sells roasted, sugar-coated tiger nuts at the entrance to her home; the ENGINE training she receives in saving and spending has immensely improved her book-keeping and taught her to work towards achieving her dreams.

“Whenever I got some money in the past I spent it all at once; but now, ENGINE has taught me to save money towards things that would further my education. For example, I am saving now to purchase the entrance and application forms. After that, I would save up for my school fees and so on until I graduate to become a nurse.”

Since getting involved in ENGINE, Safiya has saved up to N 1,400 (about \$8) in profits from her tiger nuts business and intends to refund her ENGINE savings group the loan of N 1,500 with which she used to kick off the business. She is happy that her husband supports the business and anticipates that she should soon be able to fund her ambitions from her savings, and also help her brother through school.

Determined to succeed: Building a life out of poverty

When 19-year-old Yemisi arrived in Lagos from her native Ogun State last year, she was escaping poverty and in search of greener pastures. Determined to find success in order to make a difference in the lives of her parents and two siblings, she spent the first few weeks of her arrival sleeping in a church in a Lagos suburb until a woman told her about the ENGINE project.



“When I joined ENGINE, I was just wondering if it was truly possible to make it in life, but I gathered myself together and told myself that I will make it in life. They taught us how to start a business and I started my business with N 1,000 (about \$5) recharge cards from the money my parents gave me on my way to Lagos.”

Today, Yemisi now sells items of male and female fashion and accessories and credits ENGINE for all the encouragement, motivation and education that has brought her this far. Today, she has a total net worth of about N 14,000 (about \$70). Daily, she thinks of how to expand her business, using the skills she acquired from the programme.

Yemisi is full of resolve to make it in life without depending on any one for handouts and even though she dropped out from school in her final year due to financial constraints, is determined not to remain idle because she remembers how her mum would warn her that a woman that does not have any work in hand is jobless.

Yemisi joined the ENGINE project in September 2014 and since then has gained a lot of experience. She has improved in her social skills and is not as reclusive as she used to be prior to the experience. Now, she freely mingles with people and has made many new friends. She has also learnt how to talk, face an audience, and express herself without inhibitions.

“Engine has changed so many things in me! Engine is really trying for young girls, just to sit and think that these girls of nowadays, we need to help them. They help us a lot and I want them to continue the program for young girls outside.”

Yemisi advises other young girls currently in ENGINE projects or expecting to participate, to exercise a lot of patience. She assures them that they will get the knowledge of how to make it in life, how to start a business, jewellery making, hair dressing, etc. and if they stick with the program, they will gradually experience more than they expected.

Growing her business, growing her confidence: Maryam' story

For too long, 18-year-old Maryam had to use credit to meet her family's daily needs and then wait for her husband to make a payment by the end of the month when he received his salary.

The mother of one was not too pleased and sometimes felt embarrassed by this arrangement, but there was little she could do about it. Maryam dropped out of school when she was 15, because her parents could no longer afford the fees. She had moved to Abuja and settled with her aunty who runs a retail kerosene business. It was while helping her aunty that she met and married her husband two years ago.



While Maryam sometimes laments what she could have achieved if she had the opportunity to continue her education, she has settled down to being a wife and mother and concentrates on trying to run her home efficiently.

In September 2015, one of her neighbours told her about ENGINE—an initiative funded by DFID's Girl Education Challenge and The Coca-Cola Company to improve learning outcomes and the economic status of marginalised adolescent girls, aged 16-19, in the Northern Nigerian states of Kano, Kaduna, the Federal Capital Territory, and the metropolis of Lagos, Nigeria.

Out of curiosity, Maryam went along with her neighbour to learn about the programme. She was so impressed by what she learnt that day that she stayed on and paid close attention, especially to the business and financial education sessions.

When the girls were taught about setting up businesses based on needs within their community, Maryam's mind immediately went to kerosene. Kerosene is a staple fuel for lamps, stoves, and other household uses, and it was a business she already had experience in from the time she helped out in her aunt's shop.

Maryam immediately joined a savings group and took out a loan of N5,000 (\$20) to purchase the kerosene and containers she needed to start off the business.

Today, Maryam has not only paid off the initial loan from the savings group, she has also saved up N15,000 (\$60) of her own money and set it aside from her trading capital.

Now, when her husband asks her to pick up items on credit from the neighbourhood shops, she simply uses her money to make the purchases. This has impressed her husband so much—he is full of praise for the ENGINE programme. *“Introducing the project to us helped us a lot. What we ask of ENGINE is a boost to enable us grow even bigger in our businesses.”*

Determined to succeed: Hassana's story

Every morning, 17-year-old Hassana wakes up early and prepares herself for her daily business. Hassana, who lives with her parents and two younger siblings in Mpape, a suburb in Abuja, sells a special snack of fried yams dipped in egg batter. She does not have a shop but walks around the neighbourhood with the delicacy.

Hassana is happy with her small business because, just a few months back, she would just wake up early in the morning and sit around the house the whole day. Sometimes, she would spend the whole day without even taking a bath. When she received little gifts of money from her parents, she would spend the money on cosmetics, perfumes, and other little things that caught her fancy.

Hassana had stopped formal education after primary school because her parents did not have the money to continue to put her through school. Still, she would like to go to school and become a doctor so she can help women have safer births.

In September 2014, the young girls in Hassana's neighborhood were invited to a meeting with the community leader to introduce a new programme. From there, Hassana expressed her intention to enroll in ENGINE. "When we joined ENGINE, they taught us how to take care of ourselves and taught us how to save our money. They also taught us that we can start small businesses to help ourselves and our families."

Hassana thought seriously about what she had learnt. She still wanted to be a doctor and knew that her family might not be able to support her dreams. She had to find a way to make some money and hope that, with time, she would be able to realise those dreams.



With that in mind, Hassana bought some yams and eggs and started her small business. "Now I'm making money and saving my money," she says. "I no longer spend it on just anything, and I am able to help out in the house."

The other day, for instance, there was no food to eat in the house. But, Hassana still had her profits from the week's business with her. She called her mother and gave her the profits of about N200 (\$1). With it, her mother was able to provide food for the family.

She started up her business with a loan of N2,000 (\$8) she took out with the ENGINE savings group. Today, she has not just paid off the loan, she has an additional personal savings of about N2,000. Her average weekly profit from sales is N400 (\$1.70).

Hassana eagerly awaits the opportunity to be part of the girls to learn skills. She hopes to easily combine the skills she will learn with the sales of fried yams and make more money.

"Mercy Corps told us that if we believe in what we are doing and are determined, we will make progress," she says. "And I am determined to succeed with my business."

6. Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha, Somalia

Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP)

Dreams of education become a reality; Maryan's story (mother)

Maryan is a 48 year old woman from El-Afweyn district, Sanaag region, Somaliland. Until recently, Maryan, her husband and their three teenage daughters - Deeqa, Rooda and Farah - lived in Dararwayne village. Here, Maryan and her family reared 30 sheep and goats, earning a small income by selling milk and meat. Deeqa and Rooda studied up to grade seven in Dararwayne primary school. Sadly, they were unable to continue with their education because Dararwayne primary school classes end at Grade 7 whereas a full cycle of primary schooling ends at Grade 8. This left the girls with no choice but to use their schooling hours to carry out household chores like cooking, cleaning and caring for their younger siblings at home. Maryan herself also only schooled up to Grade 7. This was due to the collapse of the central government in 1991 which destroyed all government schools and public institutions.

“When I realised that my daughters couldn’t continue their education, I wanted to move to El-Afweyn,” explains Maryan. El-Afweyn district has secondary schools where Maryan’s daughters could continue their education. However, Maryan worried that the move would have a negative impact on her family’s livelihood, making it hard for them to afford the necessary school materials. “It would be difficult because our family livelihood is dependent on Dararwayne village where we can rear livestock. Also, my husband - who has not been through school - did not share the same desire and refused to move for the sake of our daughters’ education. I was so unhappy to shatter my daughters’ dreams and my own; I really felt helpless. No one can understand the pain I had in that situation, seeing my daughters not attending school and doing only household chores. I had to hide my tears from my husband and children.”

In February 2014, Maryan heard about Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha (Somali Girls’ Education Promotion Project - SOMGEP) from a teacher. The project is increasing the number of girls in rural areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug who access, receive and complete a quality education. In El-Afweyn district, SOMGEP is supporting 13 schools (12 primary, one secondary) with Community Education Committee (CEC) training, gender and child protection awareness, provision of teaching and learning materials and literacy and numeracy training.

Maryan was very excited about the project. She informed her husband, and again tried to persuade him that they should move to El-Afweyn. The promise of support from an aid organisation and another from his wife to cover the family’s livelihood costs was enough to convince him. Leaving their familiar village behind, Maryan and her family travelled 65km (taking almost three hours) on rough roads to settle in El-Afweyn. Here, they rented one room separated into different living spaces by red polythene sheets. They had no latrine of their own so they had to share their neighbours’.

The move had a negative impact on the family’s income, but this did not deter Maryan. She worked hard and started up a small teashop near to their home to support her family. She also joined a Women’s Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) established by CARE to promote economic empowerment – a group of women who save money together and take small loans from those savings if and when the need arises. In April 2014, Maryam enrolled Deeqa and Rooda in Grade 8 and Farah in Grade 6.

Maryan is now a well-known woman leader in El-Afweyn district. In fact, the head teacher of El-Afweyn primary school recognises Maryan as one of the community members who have contributed to the increased number of girls to the current enrolment of 451 girls and 581 boys. She is a role

model to the grassroots communities; something which is repeatedly emphasised by the head teacher and Community Education Committee (CEC) members during community mobilisations.

While Maryan admits that it has not been easy to make these sacrifices at personal and family level, Maryan always dreamed she could create a better future for her girls and the girls in her community. Maryan continues to transform the community through motivational talks and her determination.

“My daughters will achieve their dreams of completing their education one day, no matter how long I struggle.”