



## TECHNICAL BRIEF

# BACK TO SCHOOL: REACHING OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

### Background

The multiple benefits of education have been well documented. Global evidence clearly substantiates the vital role that education plays in lifting families and communities out of poverty, and attests that the impacts are especially strong where girls are concerned. In a recent review of girls' education efforts worldwide, the Brookings Institution notes that girls' education has climbed to the top of developing nations' policy agendas, not only because of its positive returns for income and economic growth, but because of the evidence of high returns in other crucial areas—including improving children's and women's survival rates and health, reducing population growth, protecting children's rights and delaying child marriage, empowering women in the home and workplace, and increasing families' resilience to natural disasters. It is one of the smartest investments a country can make and an important step in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.<sup>i</sup>

Worldwide, a staggering 263 million children and youth are out of school according to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) data. This total includes 61 million primary school aged children, 60 million of lower secondary school age, and 142 million youth of upper secondary school age - the first ever estimate that includes this age group.<sup>ii</sup>

Girls are more likely than boys to remain completely precluded from education, despite the efforts and progress made over the past two decades. According to the UIS data, 15 million girls of primary school age will never have the

opportunity to enter school, compared to about 10 million boys. Over half of these girls, 9 million, live in sub-Saharan Africa with nearly 5 million more in Southern Asia. An additional 16 million girls worldwide started school but left before completing. And while girls are more likely never to enroll in school, boys are more likely to drop out, posing a complex challenge with regards to attaining education for all.<sup>iii</sup> By lower secondary school, gender differences vary markedly by region. In sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia, girls are still more likely to be out of school than boys, whereas in Southeast Asia, Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, it is boys who are out of school in larger numbers.

More than half of all out-of-school children and youth are between the ages of 15 and 17. The high upper secondary numbers are in large part a result of the aging up of the generation of children that were essentially left out of primary school altogether. The challenge before the global community is to address the particular needs of this age group without detracting from the concentrated attention still needed to ensure a quality primary education to the youngest generation in order to break the cycle once and for all. Perceiving it as an "either/or" dichotomy when it comes to directing attention and funding would severely hamper efforts to fulfill our collective commitment to realizing the right to education for every child.

## CARE's Focus on Education

Founded in 1945, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. Girls and women are at the heart of CARE's community-based efforts to improve education, health and economic opportunities for everyone because experience has shown that, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift their families and communities out of poverty. CARE's experience in education programming itself is broad, directly reaching over 6.3 million children, youth and adults through a variety of education activities in over 58 countries in 2015 alone.

CARE understands the critical importance of education for equipping young people with vital knowledge and skills needed to empower them to become productive, resilient adults who are able to sustain themselves and their families and contribute to the progress of their communities and their countries as a whole. CARE's vision for education is articulated in our Education Sector Strategy 2020;<sup>iv</sup> "CARE's education effort pursues a world in which marginalized children and youth, especially girls, have expanded life choices through access to quality learning so that all young people can successfully acquire and use knowledge and are engaged participants in their society." Thus, CARE seeks to provide education programming that is truly transformative; the end goal is not only to foster development but also to promote equity and social justice.

CARE recognizes that merely providing access to school is in itself ineffective if the additional obstacles that prevent children's participation in education are not removed. Our work seeks to address a number of known barriers to school participation, not only creating conditions for children to enroll or re-enroll, but also ensuring that once they are in school, they stay there, and they learn. CARE knows that most often the people who can most effectively address these barriers are community members and young people themselves. Our education efforts engage communities to

encourage children who are in school to stay in school, reach never-enrolled children and early dropouts, and provide alternatives to older children and adolescents who are too old to legally re-enter school. As illustrated in the examples that follow, our holistic efforts very often address all three of these groups of young people with varied approaches in one integrated program.

### Some Known Barriers to Education

- Distance
- Poor infrastructure/sanitation
- Poor quality teaching
- Lack of perceived relevance
- Traditional gender norms that favor education for boys and discourage girls
- Safety factors, including gender-based violence
- Early pregnancy
- Early, forced child marriage
- Domestic household labor
- Need to contribute to the economic support of the household
- Migration
- Conflict and fragile environments

## TANZANIA

In the rural Kahama district of Shinyanga, CARE worked with school officials to get nearly 6000 formerly out-of-school girls between the ages of 8-17 into an accelerated non-formal education (NFE) program. The NFE classes provided the opportunity to catch up and transition back into formal schooling. Classes were held in special classrooms on the same grounds as schools in order to ease the transition for graduates back to the formal school setting. To counter the uncertainty and embarrassment that overage girls initially felt about returning to primary school, mentor relationships were established in the form of Achieve! Groups, pairing groups of girls in formal education with the NFE students.







With a female teacher as facilitator, the Achieve! Group members participated in a wide variety of activities together, to their mutual benefit. Vocational skills learned were used to start cooperative income-generating activities to financially support their education. Information on sexual and reproductive health helped girls to prevent unwanted pregnancies and access services when needed. Leadership skills developed through engagement in sports, debate clubs, and student councils gave girls the confidence to interact with school and government officials and families to advocate for their rights, including to refuse to be married before finishing school.

CARE supported training for teachers in both formal and non-formal education to foster gender-sensitive classroom practices and improve the quality of instruction in both settings, further enhancing students' motivation to stay in school. Community members were brought into the conversation around girls' rights to education through community dialogues. Parents of NFE girls, particularly mothers, were supported to establish 23 Village Savings and Loan (VSL)<sup>1</sup> groups. The VSL groups provided an economic opportunity to increase household income with a particular focus on supporting school-related costs, as well as a social space where the needs and rights of girls could be discussed. As societal support for girls' education

broadened, some mothers in VSL groups started planning for how to cover daughters' costs for secondary school as well.

Prevailing attitudes that questioned the usefulness of education for girls were initially a major barrier to girls' participation in school. In a 2007 baseline study, 66% of parents stated that they would send boys to school before girls. In a follow-up study in 2015, focus group discussions with members of the same communities showed that 100% now felt that girls and boys had equal rights to education and they disagreed unanimously with the statement that "When a family cannot afford to educate all the children, only boys should go to school."

## MALI

In Mali, CARE launched its first Development Education Centers (CEDs)<sup>2</sup> to reach out-of-school children aged 12-15 in 2005. CARE enhanced the government-approved CED model by integrating leadership skills development and up to two years of vocational training or apprenticeship along with the standard acquisition of basic education competencies. CARE's centers later added the Stratégie de Scolarisation Accélérée/Passerelle (SSA/P) program for 8-11 year olds. SSA/P condenses the content of the first three years of primary school into a nine-month course, allowing

<sup>1</sup> For more information on CARE's VSLA model: [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/27/an-inclusive-emerging-economy-with-africa-in-the-lead/?\\_r=1](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/27/an-inclusive-emerging-economy-with-africa-in-the-lead/?_r=1)

<sup>2</sup> Centres d'Éducation pour le Développement

students to continue their education by enrolling in formal schools the following academic year. Training was provided to teachers in both the CEDs and SSA/P to foster gender-sensitive classroom practices. CARE's SSA/P programming reached 1,790 out-of-school children and enabled 1,631 children, more than half of them girls, to enroll in Grades 3, 4, of 5 in formal primary schools.

In order to achieve this broad enrollment of girls, CARE initiated a number of committees and groups for community members including Consensual Communities for Human Rights<sup>3</sup> and school management committees to promote human rights and improve educational access in target communities. CARE also established village savings and loan associations for women, known locally as Muso ka Jigiya Ton (MJT). MJT groups held workshops and training sessions on the importance of education and facilitated income-generating activities to help women fund their children's education.

The effectiveness of the model was widely recognized and in 2015, the enhanced CED curriculum was validated in a national workshop led by the government and was sanctioned for use in all future government CED activities throughout the country. On the local level, the successes of students in the non-formal education initiatives have resulted in a change of perception in communities about the value of education in general for both boys and girls and generated increased demand for schooling. In the region of Bandiagara, for example, local education officials have collaborated with CARE to transition the CED centers into formal schools and have committed to establishing others.

## SOMALIA

Across Somalia, including the remote and rural areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Central Somalia, CARE is working with communities, students, teachers, and local leaders to

address the multi-faceted challenges that students and their families face. Some of these challenges, including poverty, lack of infrastructure, resistance to secular education, poor quality teaching and lack of relevance to the reality of their lives, affect both girls and boys and keep many out of school. Girls, however, face the additional obstacles of restrictive traditional gender norms, cultural and religious practices resulting in a preference for boys' education, mostly male teaching staff, lack of appropriate sanitation facilities, and customs of early marriage. The recurring drought crisis and environmental degradation in the region prompts increased migration of adolescent girls and boys apart from their families, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In some cases, entire villages have been deserted, as the local population migrates in search of food and water.

### Hamdi's Story

*Hamdi and her five siblings were abandoned by her parents when she was six years old, shortly after they had fled fighting in their hometown for Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. Hamdi and her siblings were left to fend for themselves in an internally displaced persons' camp with her oldest sister becoming the only mother they know. Hamdi attended school briefly but stopped after grade one when the school was shut for lack of funds. Hamdi began washing clothes for other families to help support herself and her siblings. In November 2014, through community outreach, Hamdi's sister heard about the new CARE primary school opening in their camp. Excited, she immediately made Hamdi quit her job, and enrolled Hamdi and three of her siblings back in school despite the fact that they were supporting the family with daily income. Hamdi, now 12, is at the top of her class and is excited about being a student again and learning new things. She dreams of becoming a doctor to be able to help other people.*



<sup>3</sup> Communauté Consensuelle des Droits Humaines

CARE is working with a wide variety of partners in mobilizing Community Education Committees and community elders, religious leaders and women groups to address gender roles and support for education; training teachers in child-friendly teaching methods; supporting extra-curricular and support activities, and building and updating infrastructure so that all children have access to quality education and safe sanitation facilities. A particularly important area of focus has been establishing schools for internally displaced children living in camps near Mogadishu.

In addition to the support of the formal school systems, CARE has established 10 alternative education centers, which provide a unique opportunity for older students who never finished primary school to complete an accelerated primary school equivalency program. Literacy classes for mothers have led to their increased support for girls to enroll and regularly attend school. Vocational training for youth provides critically needed skills for economic engagement and serves as a deterrent to recruitment into armed conflict or piracy.

In the past two years alone, more than 30,000 children are back in school or attending for the first time as a result of CARE's efforts across Somalia.

## TIMOR-LESTE

In Timor-Leste, CARE targeted at-risk students in grades 4, 5 and 6 to increase student attendance and prevent dropout through a combination of efforts with school personnel, students, parents, and community members, reaching 7,900 students in five of the poorest districts.

The implementation of an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) enhanced the capacity of schools to address the needs of at-risk pupils, strengthened the partnership between parents and school personnel, and raised awareness among parents and the community about the value of children staying in school and what parents can do to support their children. Teachers closely monitored the attendance, behavior and coursework of students who were identified as most at risk for dropping out. When a student showed signs of struggling, responses included extra in-class attention, contact with parents via letter, phone call and/or home visit, and, in more serious instances, case management meetings with school staff to develop an individualized program of intervention. CARE enlisted the support of parent-teacher associations and other community

groups in some of the first response activities, working closely with the school. In some instances, contact with parents was made through community "Stay in School" groups whose members would notify parents of a problem and follow up with home visits to discuss issues and solutions. Community-wide events were held to discuss how parents could support their children in school. Teachers, school directors and community members all felt that the increased and improved contact with the families was a particularly positive feature of the program, helping both families and teachers better understand the issues their children faced<sup>v</sup>.

Weekly extra-curricular activities that included games, songs, and crafts were also instituted to heighten students' motivation to attend school. The cooperative activities enhanced self-confidence and connection with other students. Teachers began to use the interactive instructional techniques they learned for the extra-curricular activities in their regular classes, making them more student-centered. Parents and teachers noted that the combination of activities had a positive impact on improved attendance, behavior and general performance.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Sperling, Gene & Rebecca Winthrop. 2016. What Works in Girls' Education. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution

<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO. 2016. Leaving no one behind: How far on the way to universal primary and secondary education? Policy Paper 27/Fact Sheet 37. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002452/245238E.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> UNESCO. 2015. Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges—Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>iv</sup> CARE. 2014. CARE's Education Strategy 2020: Addressing Inequities; Empowering Learners. <http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CARE-Education-Strategy-2020-WEB.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Creative Associates International (2015). Do Early Warning Systems and Student Engagement Activities Reduce Dropout? Findings from the School Dropout Prevention Pilot Program Impact Evaluation in Timor-Leste. Washington D.C.





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Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year CARE worked in 84 countries and reached 122 million people around the world. To learn more, visit [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).