

Mid-Term Evaluation

“Safe and quality education for girls and boys in displacement situations in Ethiopia and Somalia”

Funded by the European Union, Implemented by Plan International, Relief International, University of Sussex

Executive Summary

The project “Safe and quality education for girls and boys in displacement situations in Ethiopia and Somalia” is being implemented by Plan International (Plan), together with Relief International (RI), the University of Sussex (UoS), the University of Gambella (GU), and the Puntland Development and Research Centre. The aim of the project is to improve access to quality and inclusive education in a safe environment; it is funded by the European Union (EU) under the Building Resilience in Crises through Education initiative (BRiCE) initiative and implemented in the Gambella region of Ethiopia - host to South Sudanese refugees - and the Puntland region of Somalia - host to a large number of internally displaced people (IDPs).

This midterm evaluation is conducted to assess project performance to date against the OECD DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. It also examines four specific research questions laid out by the consortium in a Terms of Reference. The midterm evaluation draws on 50 focus groups and key informant interviews conducted in Gambella and Puntland, with beneficiaries and key stakeholders, as well as 17 in-depth interviews conducted with project partners and management staff.

Findings by OECD DAC criteria

Relevance: The evaluation finds that the intervention is strongly relevant within each context - however relevance across contexts is still limited. The project responds to priorities identified by the humanitarian, development, research community, and by the project beneficiaries. Response to the COVID-19 pandemic was implemented in an appropriate manner and is still ongoing. Project design questions arise regarding the comparability (or lack thereof) between the Gambella and Puntland contexts. Two diverse countries and population groups were chosen, but the rationale for the choice and the added value of the decision was not explained in the program design. The decision to include two such diverse contexts increased complexity for both implementation and research design. There is little added value and greater cost associated with the choice of contexts – although value could be added if a rationale was developed, and a ‘learning objective’ was outlined.

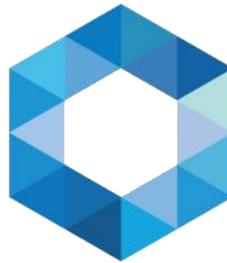
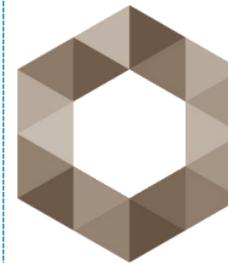
Coherence: While the BRiCE project was designed to encourage coherence with local government actors and individual agency projects, it was not designed to be fully coherent between implementing partners. Coherence with local government actors is strong, which generates benefits including increased impact; for example, Puntland authorities identified a successful project activity (school codes of conduct) and scaled the activity up across the region. At the design phase, there was lack of coherence between Plan and RI as well as between research and implementation partners. The lack of coherence between research and implementation partners was resolved, with evaluation no longer being undertaken by UoS – but the lack of coherence between Plan and RI remains. For example, Plan and RI have not harmonised safeguarding approaches between countries and project staff at field level have different ways of approaching activities.

Effectiveness: The project is highly effective at community and system level interventions - but needs to improve at targeting marginalised groups and providing tailored gender-specific support. Project activities are rolling out broadly in line with the revised logical framework. Strong relationships have been built with communities, local authorities and teachers. The project has not yet, however, delivered on its potential to reach groups that face stigma when enrolling in school; this is in large part due to a lack of specificity in project design and kick-off regarding if/how stigma should be addressed, and what is meant by inclusion. Gender could also be better considered at the level of beneficiaries (addressing barriers faced by single mothers and married girls in enrolment), teachers (the need to support women both in becoming teachers and engaging in more extensive CPD) and the system (the need to ensure that teachers fully

grasp gender-sensitive pedagogical methods). Progress has been made in rolling out EMIS. In the implementation phase, research partners collaborated strongly and successfully with implementation partners to collect and analyse data, and to revise program modalities to correspond to research findings. Sampling choices, however (particularly lack of representativeness), may limit the ways in which programme actors can use the data collected by research partners, and the degree to which learning can take place beyond the given context and timeframe.

Efficiency: The evaluation team finds that the project is being managed in an efficient way, using adaptive techniques. These adaptive techniques may however lead to some lack of clarity with partners. Co-funding decisions have affected the phasing of resource availability, particularly in Puntland, where field staff had strong access to technical support during early project phases when co-funding was available, and limited access once the co-funding was complete. Intra consortium exchange can be increased. The research component could have been more efficient if qualitative methodologies had been used, as the cost of data collection would have been lower, but the outputs would still have been relevant to the context.

Impact and Sustainability: This report reflects the results of a mid-line review; given that project activities have not been fully implemented, there is limited scope to comment on impact and sustainability. The evaluation team did find that the project’s strong focus on engagement and interactions with other actors have supported impact and sustainability.

OECD Evaluation Criteria				
RELEVANCE	COHERENCE	EFFECTIVENESS	EFFICIENCY	IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY
 <p>Highly relevant within each context but limited relevance across contexts</p>	 <p>Strong coherence with local governments and insufficient coherence between</p>	 <p>Great effectiveness at community and system level but needs improvement at targeting</p>	 <p>Efficient overall Intra consortium exchange and the research component could improve</p>	 <p>Limited scope to comment in mid-line review</p>

	implementing partners	marginalised groups		
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Findings by Evaluation Question

How effective has the project been in creating safe environments for boys and girls in their schools and surrounding environments? The evaluation finds that the project has successfully worked with communities to improve the community protection environment, and has made efforts to improve the physical and social environment at school. There are, however, some contextual elements that affect attendance and learning outcomes but that are not addressed by the project, notably household level barriers such as girls’ chores and wider social cohesion issues between displaced and host populations. Marginalised groups could be better integrated into the project; currently limited measures are being taken to address the needs of groups facing stigma.

To what extent did the project achieve its objective of creating access to safe and quality education?

The evaluation finds that the project had several high-level successes with regard to improving the policy environment, but these have not yet fully translated to classrooms. In terms of safe education, the project not only worked on codes of conduct and policies, but worked with local governments and the humanitarian community for wider uptake. In terms of quality of education, the project built innovative and successful relationships with teacher training colleges. Despite these gains, protection risks persist at schools, with high incidence of corporal punishment and limited capacity among teachers to implement gender-sensitive pedagogical methods. Students report that standard learning methods such as rote learning are still the most frequent form of pedagogical method. The context around complementary and remedial education is challenging: dropout rates are high during non-pandemic times, and are likely to increase due to COVID-19. Adaptation of the complementary education approaches used in this project may help to ensure that access is improved and maintained even in complex COVID-19 contexts.

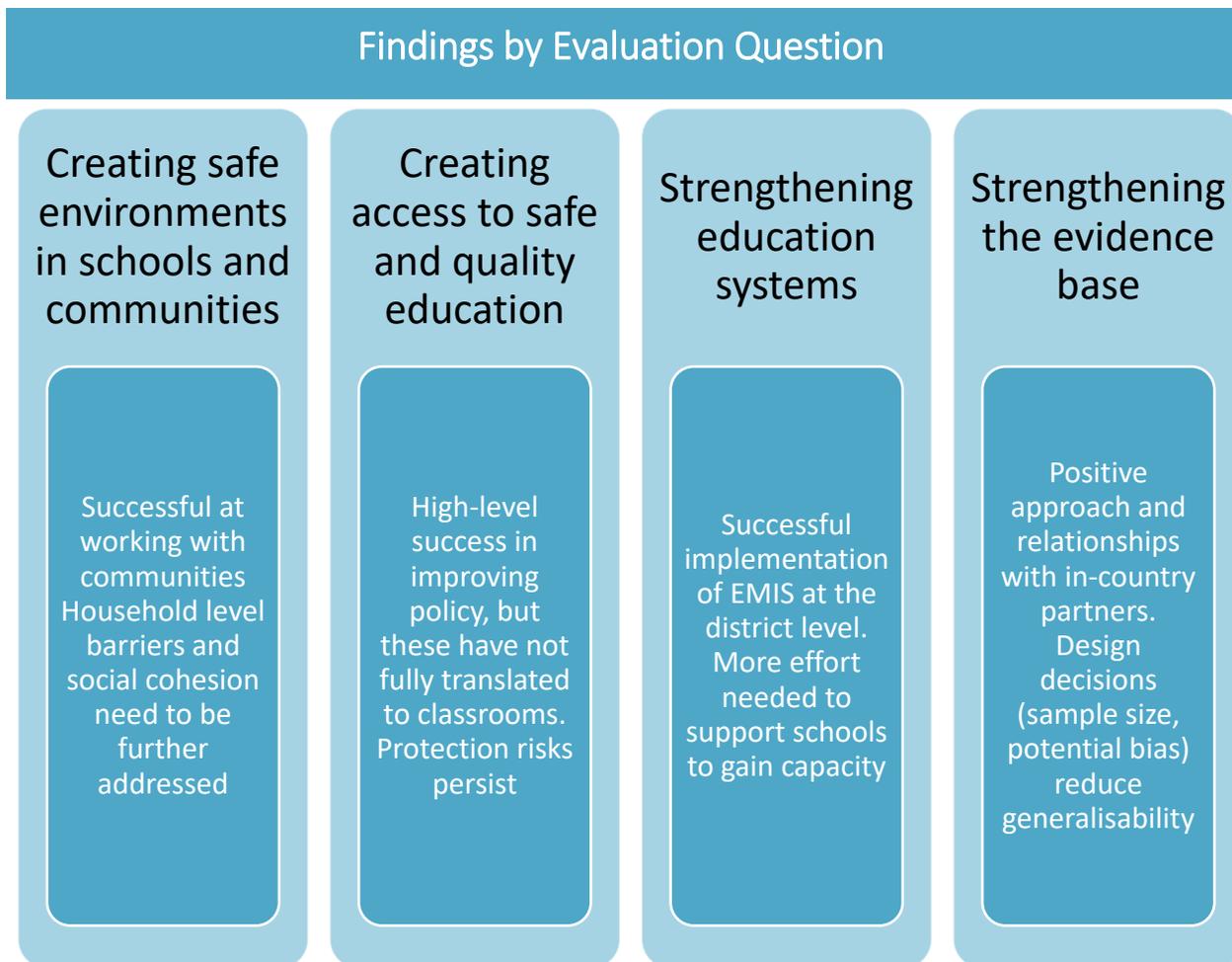
To what extent has the project been effective in strengthening the education system in the two target regions of Gambella (Ethiopia) and Puntland (Somalia), and to be inclusive and gender sensitive?

The evaluation finds that the project has been effective in strengthening the capacity of government and project stakeholders on the application of EMIS at the district and school-levels. Both government actors and project staff stated that the training and secondment of staff approaches had been worthwhile; however, more effort is needed to support schools to gain the capacity to use the system. In order to improve uptake at the school and learning centre level, partners should carefully target training participants, and engage in long-term training with follow up and mentorship. It was challenging to evaluate the degree to which the project supported inclusion and gender sensitivity, as no clear goals were set out regarding inclusion (which groups were to be targeted, what should be achieved) or gender sensitivity in the project design or inception phase.

To what extent has the project been effective in developing and implementing the longitudinal study that should contribute to the evidence-based approach of the project and to advise the policy makers in both the countries?

The project developed and implemented a longitudinal study that will contribute to the evidence-base on education and displacement, but design decisions (such as small sample size, with less than 50 teachers in Somalia being sampled) limit the degree to which data is representative and generalizable, and thus can be used to inform future programming. Conducting a study in fragile environments and having the data collected over two phases is positive. Similarly, the close and equitable involvement of local research partners is a success. Unfortunately, several design factors, including small sample size, lack of consistency between questionnaire used in the two countries and the openness of the questionnaire to interpretation and bias limit the degree to which programme decisions should be made

using research results. Despite this, research uptake by field staff has been high, and constitutes a success.



Best Practices

The Mothers in School program shows strong promise, especially in contexts with few female teachers.

The Mothers in School program, in which women within a community engage strongly with schools and act as a focal point and reference for girls in school, is a best practice. Several girls’ focus groups (in both the 10-14 age range and the 15 – 18 age range) referred to Mothers in School, or mother champions, without prompting from the facilitators. They discussed feeling safe with Mothers in School, and voluntarily approaching mothers for advice and guidance, particularly when they felt unsafe or when they faced a threat. Mothers in School, in turn, link girls at risk to wider community protection mechanisms. Facilitators noted that the role of Mothers in School is significant given the relative absence of female teachers and staff to provide support. There is a need to scale up the initiative and empower Mothers in School with the knowledge, and skills necessary to fully discharge their responsibilities; to provide quality services on a case by case basis.

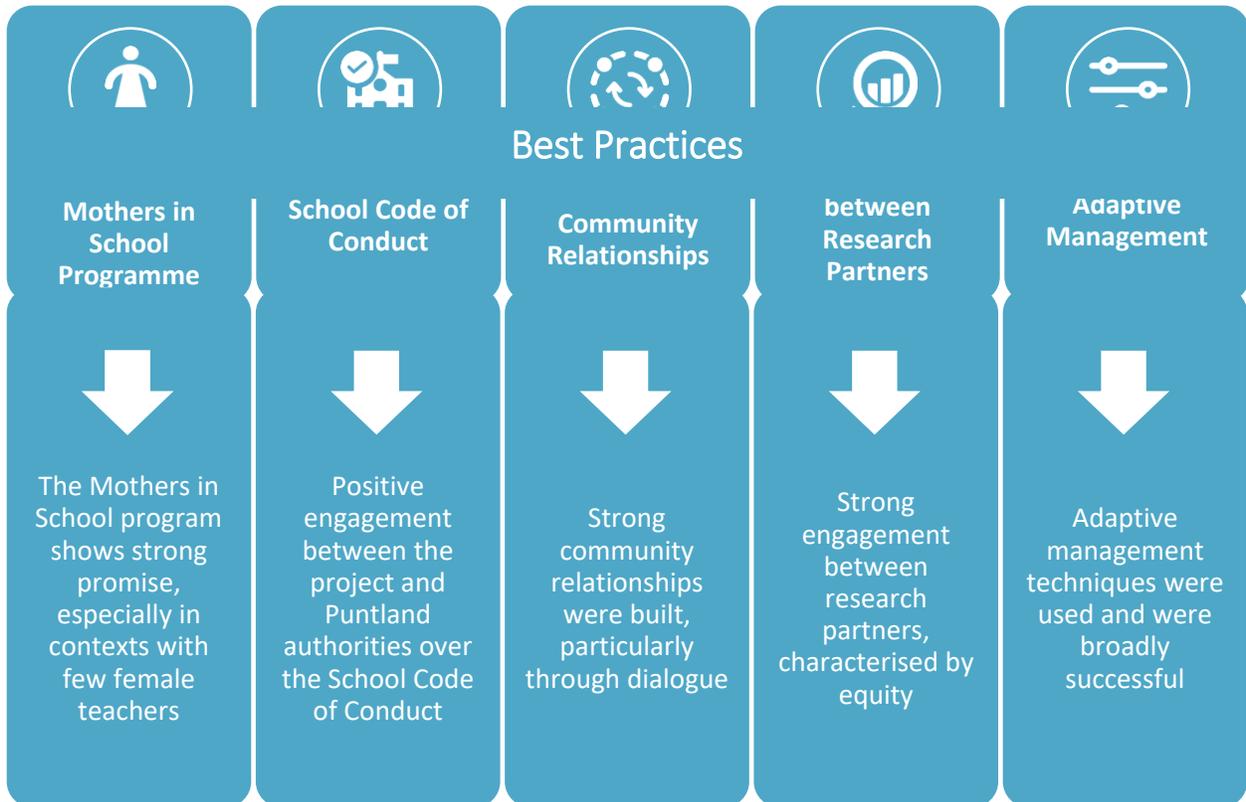
The engagement between the project and Puntland authorities over the School Code of Conduct. A school code of conduct was developed in the context of this project, as well as the Girls’ Education Project

(which acted as co-funding). The code of conduct was implemented in all project schools, and extensive advocacy took place with state actors. The Puntland government adopted the Code of Conduct at a state-wide level, and it is now applicable in all schools through the region. This is a strong success, showing positive interaction and coherence between project partners, schools and authorities. Further roll out is required at the classroom level to ensure the policy is taken up.

Strong community relationships were built, particularly through dialogue. In both Ethiopia and Somalia, extensive community engagement activities took place and solid relationships were created with communities. The approaches used were particular to the context and were tailored to local interests. In Ethiopia, community dialogue initiatives were used, and were more successful than traditional methods, as they were more interactive and engaging. In Somalia, local committees took on issues such as bullying.

There is a strong engagement between research partners, characterised by equity. The research part of the consortium consists of two local actors (PDRC and GU) and one international actor (UoS). UoS developed a strong relationship with both GU, the research partner in Gambella, and PDRC, the research partner in Puntland. This relationship was established with the active involvement of Plan International. The methods of engagement with the local research actors were very positively perceived, as it was based on equality and mutual respect. It should be noted that such strong, collaborative and respectful engagement with local partners is rare, and as such it constitutes a success.

Adaptive management techniques were used and were broadly successful. In general, management of projects in volatile conditions can be problematic; project activities and outputs may be rendered irrelevant or ineffective part-way through implementation, activities may need to stop completely and new partnerships or ways of working may need to be formed. The approach of consortium management has, by and large, conformed to the principles of adaptive management. All actors in the project, from the consortium management to local research partners, have maintained a consistent and stable



understanding of the project's aims and objectives. The use of adaptive management has been strongly positive in terms of ensuring continued implementation and progress toward goals.

Key Takeaways for Consortium Management

The consortium should outline a strategy for assuring relevance across diverse project contexts. The consortium should engage in a reflection session on what exactly the value add of the diverse project contexts is, and how they would like to leverage this value add. They should consider strategic and programmatic measures, as well as involvement of HQ/Regional and field staff level. The consortium should outline its intentions with regard to relevance and learning: do they intend to bring coherence to the project across contexts through comparison of activities, engagement on themes that are common across the countries, or some other mechanism? They should then use the evidence base that has been generated during the first phase of the project to identify methods of engaging across countries. Finally, they should develop a set of steps for ensuring relevance. These steps should include HQ and regional actors (on topics such as translating gender-sensitive education to teachers) as well as field staff.

The consortium should strengthen its approaches to marginalised groups. The consortium has achieved success in building community protection mechanisms, and ensuring that learners have trust in these mechanisms. Significantly more work could be done to leverage these mechanisms to support the most vulnerable groups, including out of school children, married and pregnant girls and children with disabilities. Community activities could be tailored specifically to these groups. Similarly, evidence indicates that there is a bias against female teachers at a contextual level, affecting teacher enrolment in CPD and roll out of gender-sensitive pedagogical methods. A targeted effort is required to understand barriers and address these barriers. This could start by dedicated analysis of barriers facing different marginalised groups, and include participatory activity development.

The consortium should develop a common understanding on the higher-level aspects of the research, and jointly develop dissemination messages. The evaluation finds that the research study is very well integrated into implementing partner activities, including at the field level. This integration, however, is operational - there is integration with regard to logistical support, requests for support in improving activities and requests for support in adapting engagement strategies. There is little evidence from key informant interviews that field staff understand the limitations of the data collection process; they assume that the results of the study are applicable across population groups, displacement types and age groups. Similar issues are likely to arise when broader dissemination takes place both to policymakers - particularly local government actors - and implementing partners. The consortium should aim to disseminate information about the ways in which the research should be used, and develop joint messages and language about limitations as well as findings (further discussed under evaluation question 4).

The consortium should adapt beneficiary feedback mechanisms to include information about project progress, and communicate this regularly to management. The evaluation indicated that there is a discrepancy between beneficiary and staff perceptions about project achievements. This included larger scale issues such as social cohesion and more concrete issues such as the state of school infrastructure. Such discrepancies may limit project impact and sustainability if not detected and addressed early. The evaluation team suggests that implementing staff (ideally from the M&E team, to support safety and neutrality) conduct quarterly FGDs with beneficiaries about critical project outcomes and intended impact, and communicate the results with implementing staff and consortium management. This is likely to minimise miscommunication and optimise impact.

The consortium should identify key learning needs and target activities to fill these needs. The evaluation has identified a variety of knowledge gaps among consortium members, including but not

limited to: (1) the barriers facing women in becoming teachers, and ways to address these barriers, (2) the precise technical expertise required to incorporate children with disabilities more effectively into programming, (3) ways in which best practices in government engagement can be leveraged between Somalia and Ethiopia, (4) household barriers facing girls in addressing education and ways in which addressing these barriers can be mainstreamed, and (5) ways to support uptake of child centred pedagogical methods in the classroom (including ways of reducing incidence of corporal punishment). It is possible to address some, but not all, of these information gaps to better inform future projects – but in order to do this, it will be necessary to organise data collection and analysis appropriately within the last phase of the project.