Summary

Link Community Development’s ‘Life skills and Literacy for Improved Girls’ Learning in Rural Wolaita’ project aims to improve girls’ enrolment, retention and performance in 123 elementary schools across four woredas (districts) in Wolaita Zone of south-west Ethiopia. The project has reached over 62,000 girls and addresses a wide variety of challenges girls face through holistic, low-cost, low-tech yet ambitious interventions.

A key aspect of the project is raising community awareness of the standard of education their children are entitled to receive alongside opportunities for holding the schools and government accountable for providing that standard.

School Performance Review (SPR)

We know that access to accurate information, used to good effect, empowers communities, schools and local government to improve the quality of education. However, accurate information and good management skills are not always available. Our innovative School Performance Review (SPR) process supports districts to collect, analyse, share and use information to improve the education which schools deliver. With this information, schools know where they should focus their resources to improve, and where they should celebrate good achievements. Schools can analyse their strengths and weaknesses and jointly agree on targets for their School Improvement Plan.

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At their School Performance Appraisal meeting in 2015 the community discussed how female students in lower and upper primary were consistently underperforming in all subjects compared to boys. As a result they set a target to ‘Improve female students’ academic performance in all grades and subjects’ in the Gender Action Plan (GAP) section of their School Improvement Plan.

Different stakeholder groups were tasked with activities to achieve this target. Parents decided to reduce or re-arrange household workloads allowing girls to attend punctually and time to do homework; contribute 3 ETB (about 10 pence) to buy fuel for a generator to enable remedial classes and evening study; and to employ three librarians so that the school library was open for students until 9 pm. The school management team agreed to perform classroom observations with timely feedback for teachers; arrange daily study programmes in the school library; hold frequent discussions with parents of poor-performing girls; provide budget to support teachers with additional stationery materials; conduct in-house training for tutorial teachers; and meet regularly with PTA and School Improvement Committee regarding girls’ education performance.

The Girls’ Club coordinator committed to provide counselling and weekly surgeries to develop self-confidence and motivate female students; and to hold discussions with mothers of girls to raise awareness on the importance of female education. Teachers were expected to identify weak performing female students and set them improvement targets; group girls with similar problem areas and design different mechanisms for supporting them such as tutorial classes, one-to-one support and even purchase supplementary materials; encourage female students to actively participate in class to build their confidence and self-esteem; and make themselves available for students who needed help but were too shy to participate.

As a result of these collaborative efforts the first semester exam results showed that top performing students in all grades were girls with averages ranging from 84% to 97%.

Ato Samuel Degu, the Head Teacher said "for the first time in my experience as a Head Teacher and the first time in the history of Bade Woide girls have ranked 1st at all grade levels gives me so much happiness. Given that Bade Woide is one of the GEC sample schools in Kindo Koisha, I am also really happy that the extraordinary improved academic performance of female students is evident that GEC interventions are working."