

Challenging Harmful Attitudes and Norms for Gender Equality and Empowerment in Somalia (CHANGES) Project: Women's Empowerment

Background

Somalia ranked fourth on the UN Gender Inequality Index in 2012¹. Women are underrepresented and excluded in most spheres of society, including social, political and economic, which added to poor existing systems of health care and education, create a vicious cycle. Increasing women's social and economic empowerment was therefore a primary objective of the CHANGES project, with interventions at both the societal and community level. Civil society and women's rights groups worked alongside religious leaders and scholars at the societal level, to influence existing legal and policy frameworks, as well as to promote women's agency. Three targeted initiatives were implemented at the community levels namely-

- community dialogues and engaging men and boys (EMB) with the objective of sensitizing community members and opinion leaders about FGM/C;
- village saving and lending associations (VSLA) and economic and social empowerment (EA\$E) with the goal to create economic platforms for women, in order to positively change the ways in which men view women and their opinions;
- CHOICES curriculum for young adolescents (both in and out of school) targeting 10 to 14 year olds in the community, focusing on equality, fairness and respect between the sexes, as well as advocating for girls' education over marriage.

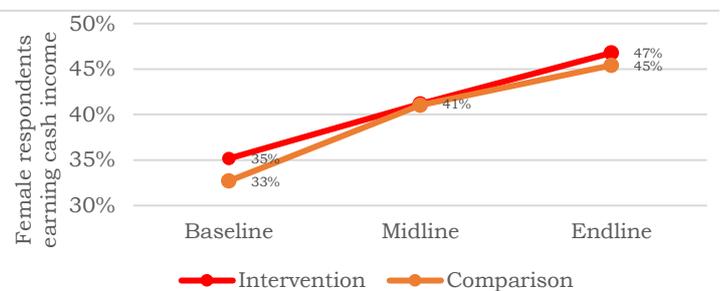
Data and methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted for collecting data. For the quantitative analyses, panel data was collected from adults to primarily assess the impact at the community level. This followed a combination of experimental and quasi-experimental method for evaluating changes because of the interventions of the CHANGES project.² Target groups were identified at the community level, as well as respondents of similar profiles for comparison during the baseline survey in early 2017. The survey included 50 pairs of communities, spread across 10 districts. A total of 2,305 respondents were recorded at baseline, including "opinion leaders" (398- roughly half female), "general female" (994), and "general male" (913). The midline survey was conducted in early 2019, and the endline in late 2020. In communities with significant attritions, replacement respondents were added, with the number of respondents at midline and endline being 2,271 and 2,389 respectively including replacements. This was complemented by qualitative data - key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) which were conducted with project leadership and community leaders. Project leaders were questioned on project management, integration within respective organizational priorities and programmes, coordination among different actors, sustainability, changes in outcome and the value for money of the different components. Community leaders were asked about their perceptions of social norms, the role of influential actors, and changes in people's opinions.

Findings and outcomes

- Increased participation in cash earning activities by women and control over income.** There appears a significant increase in cash earning activities from baseline to endline in both intervention and comparison communities as can be seen from figure 1, with the rate being 2% more at the endline for intervention communities, whereas it was the same at midline. Interestingly, most of the increase took place in households headed by men.

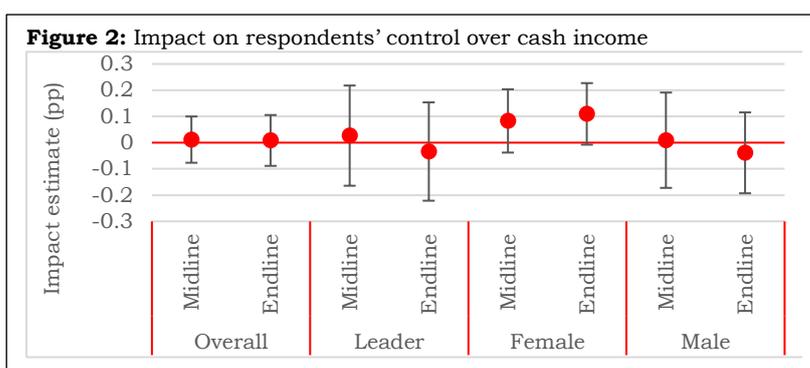
Figure 1: Female respondents' engagement cash earning activities



¹ The next frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene, Human Development Report 2020,

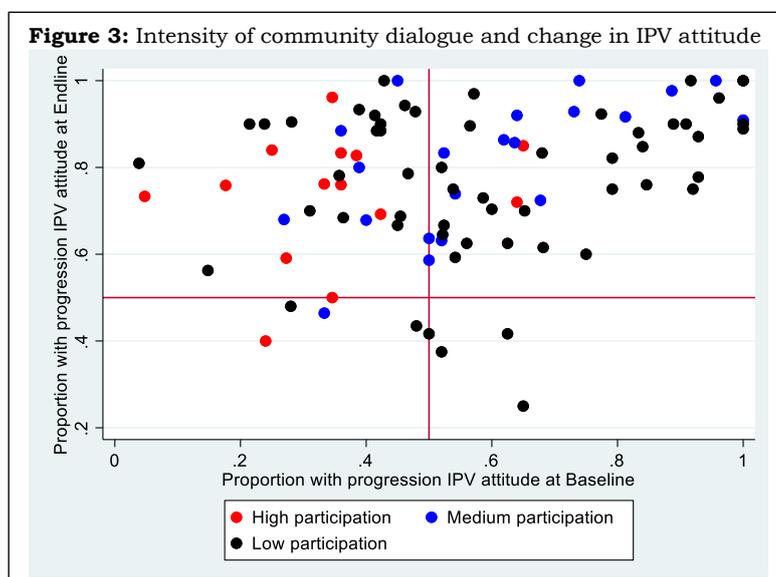
² Large communities were divided into artificial clusters that were randomized into treatment and control groups, and for small communities a neighbouring village was selected as a comparison cluster. See endline report for more details.

Figure 2 shows the control over cash, which female respondents report an increase in at the endline. FGD participants also highlighted financial services offered by VSLA as well as awareness building activities. Some participants also mentioned restrictions set by men, and possible ways to go about them.



2. **Women's role in decision making.** Four areas were looked at when it comes to women's decision making- their own healthcare, major household purchases, purchase daily needs and visiting family/relatives. These are the common items on decision-making used in demographic and health surveys globally as well as MICS survey in Somalia. There appears to be a decline as reported by female participants, and a significant increase from male respondents. This could be the result of differences in understanding of what the respective groups understand by "participation in decision-making", with women having higher expectations due to the project.

3. **Improving attitude towards IPV.** Given the sensitive nature of this topic, the level of intimate partner violence (IPV) was tracked by asking respondents if they felt it was "acceptable" for husbands to beat their wives under various circumstances. We find positive impact amongst all respondents, but it is particularly encouraging for males. While the overall impact on progressive attitude towards IPV is at endline is 12 pp, the impact on male respondents is 18 pp. We also see the communities with the highest participation in CHANGES activities, are the ones with the most improvements (Figure 3). The



endline report documents positive correlation between the intensity of interventions and the level of changes indicating benefits of reaching a larger share of community.

4. **Reducing bias in girls' education and aspirations for children's education.** 13 of the 18 KIIs mentioned correlations with women's earning and the access to education for children, and delayed marriages. Female respondents also reported to be less biased against girl's education at the endline. Estimated effect for this sample is 15 pp, as a result of project intervention. Additionally, parents were more likely to state university degrees at educational goals for their children.

"... if girls stop leaving schools and start getting pregnant every year, our country will be so much better in a few years"- adolescent male respondent during FGD

The CHANGES project aimed at challenging harmful social norms such as the lack of opportunities for women. In total, the project reached 19,519 participants directly, and over 180,000 indirectly, across six administrative states in Somalia. The successes of the project prove that it can be replicated and bring about larger positive changes. VSLA and EA\$E were frequently identified to have assisted women's economic empowerment whereas EMB contributed to reducing gender bias in education.