



KNOWLEDGE MATTERS

Community Engagement

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Knowledge Matters basics

Knowledge Matters offers practice-relevant analysis relating to the development and humanitarian work of Concern Worldwide. It provides a forum for staff and partners to exchange ideas and experiences. The publication is committed to encouraging high quality analysis in the understanding of Concern's work. Concern staff and partners document their ideas and experiences through articles. Articles are very short – 500 – 1,500 words. Usually you only have space to make one or two interesting points. Here are some tips on writing a short feature article:

- Start by imagining your audience – a Concern colleague. Why are they interested – why do they want to read what you have to say? When you identify what your most important point is, say it straight away, in the title or first sentence.
- What can others learn from your story? Focus on this. Remember to back up your story with evidence. This can be taken from evaluations.
- It's easier to get people reading if you start with the human perspective – mentioning real people and real-life events. (You don't have to give names).
- Use short sentences. Use Concern's style guide to help you.

- Keep paragraphs to a maximum of six lines long.
- Use clear language. Many of the readers of Knowledge Matters are non-native English or French speakers, so think carefully about using phrases or colloquial language that might not be easily understood by others.
- Always avoid assuming too high a level of knowledge of the topic you are writing about on the part of the reader.
- Use active sentences ('we held a workshop' not 'a workshop was held by us')
- Use short and clear expressions.
- Keep your title short - no more than eight words.
- Where necessary use photos to accompany the narrative but ensure that you follow the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

Cover photo: YouthLink and Concern BRCIS staff jointly facilitating Goal Free Communication with Gaheyr community in Wadajir Banadir region, Somalia, 2019. Photo: Hussein.

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From the Issue Editor

I have been looking forward to producing this issue of Knowledge Matters on Community Engagement for a long time. I have always been impressed with the breadth of programme types we implement in Concern and have been fascinated to see how communities in extremely varying contexts and circumstances have embraced us. It has been humbling to see communities put their faith in us again and again, often during some of the worst periods of their lives. I know we need to deliver on that faith, and so the critical examination of our approaches, methodologies and the work itself is vital to meet this end.

It has struck me how often we are reminded in Concern that no matter what role we each may perform, every single thing we do has

an end beneficiary in mind. Our beliefs and mandates explained in How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty and our Approaches to Emergencies policies reinforce this people-centred approach.

This issue of Knowledge Matters is an opportunity to examine some of the different ways we work in communities in different countries and contexts. Even the fact that we have three countries represented twice in this issue is testament to how varied our programmes can be in-country! The issue begins with a thought piece from Connell Foley, Director of the Strategy, Advocacy and Learning Directorate who takes us through the evolution of approaches to community engagement since the 1990s and reflects on how Concern engages with communities today in 2020. Next, we visit Somalia to explore the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia consortium's approach to community engagement. We then have two articles from Kenya, firstly examining the results of research into the Community Conversations approach and secondly exploring the rich experience of using this approach across all sectors and programme types in Kenya. We turn to Bangladesh next with an article examining the use of Community Resilience Vision Statements to introduce a complex flood resilience methodology, followed by another article that looks at the use of 'Change Makers' to engage communities in a livelihood security programme. We then explore community engagement in the fragile and conflict-affected context of the Central African Republic and look at how our team have adapted several of these methodologies to the post-conflict context there. Finally, we end with an article exploring the success of the education programme in Somalia and their use of Community Education Committees.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue as much as I have enjoyed compiling it. I would very sincerely like to thank all of those who contributed to this issue in a historic and challenging year.

Finola Mohan, Programme Knowledge and Learning Adviser, Dublin

Community Engagement and Concern Programmes

Written By Connell Foley

Concern has always worked on the ground and been a community centred organisation. Our vision has long been one of empowering extremely poor people and communities to do things for themselves and to have their voice heard where decisions were being made. We look for partners who share this vision.

But let's be honest, many organisations say that!

When I joined Concern in the very late 1990s, our approach to our development programming was based on the core principle of participation and putting that principle into practice through the use of "participatory methodologies" and tools such as PRA, PLA, CLTS, REFLECT, DELTA,¹ Training for Transformation etc. Projects were designed with communities using classic Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methods, where communities were facilitated to identify their needs, their strengths, their own resources and agency, to decide on what projects to prioritise, then to plan these, implement them and monitor progress themselves. Usually, this resulted in small affinity groups working on projects that they felt would be useful to the members, so some people were involved in Farmers Groups, others in Water Groups,

others in savings and loan associations etc. Under the standard community development model, these were usually coordinated or overseen by a Village Development Committee (VDC), which was a kind of link to governmental support and resources. This was the core approach to community development. Interestingly, it also provided the kind of platform for governmental decentralisation processes (be careful, there are a number of so-called decentralisation models!) where villages developed their own plans and these contributed to parish/commune plans, leading up to district level and provincial development plans.

Since then many things changed, the shift from area-based to sector wide approaches (that has now swung full circle!), the shift from a localised project approach to a wider programme approach, the headlong rush to maximise donor funding with its trailing loss of flexible approaches to design, and results-based management to systems strengthening and decentralisation approaches, among other trends. Interestingly and much more under NGO control, came an increasingly pervasive "instrumentalisation" of participation and community mobilisation. Under our sectoral programmes, Concern would "mobilise" groups and committees from the community to help deliver on pre-determined programme outcomes.

We seemed to drift away from the alternative tradition, much more prevalent under general community development and livelihoods approaches, of supporting the communities to mobilise and organise as they saw fit and useful. It is the distinction that some of the Asian community development NGOs made between "community organising" and what was seen as inferior and instrumentalising, the "community mobilising". It is a subtle but important distinction. The "organising" model opens up the thread of federation and the pathway to social movements with all their potential and challenges.

¹ CLTS= Community-Led Total Sanitation, REFLECT = Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques, DELTA = Development Education Leadership Team in Action

So how does Concern engage with communities in 2020?

I have been concerned by the focus of both the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) and its successor, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on “complaint response mechanisms” (CRMs). While both HAP and CHS started with the proper notion of “accountability to beneficiaries”, that INGOs should be accountable to those on whose behalf they purport to work, this has seemed to gradually become reduced and boiled down to complaint response mechanisms. Surely, what is required is an ongoing open dialogue between the programme participants and the service provider (Concern) where issues and progress are being discussed in an organic way on a very regular basis, with close and regular contact between Concern or partner front line workers and communities. The CRMs may have their place and may be useful tools but this regular dialogue is the essence of community engagement.

In this edition of Knowledge Matters, examples of how Concern supports Community Action Plans in both Bangladesh (the *Chars* example from our partner ASOD) and Somalia (the BRCiS example) attest to this regular contact and openness to discuss changes and adaptations that the community sees as necessary or desirable. This gets to the heart of good community engagement. The rationale behind the Community Conversations approach lies in this foundation of participation and hearing people’s voices and enriching local and government plans with input from communities that is not once-off (“consulted”) but ongoing and reflexive. Concern Kenya has really invested in this approach and describe well the value they and the communities perceive that it brings. It is also very useful to get the views and findings of an independent researcher on the value and shortcomings of the Community Conversations approach. We need to continue to have external critiques of our work and the assumptions we make.

We need to view community engagement as the process by which we maximise participation; where we place communities and local institutions at the centre of programmes and Concern on the edges, as a supporter. It feels like we have gone back to Concern being at the centre, delivering services to communities and they fitting into our plans as opposed to the other way around.

The production of this edition of Knowledge Matters had me scurrying to see what I had written on this topic in the past and I found a draft document I wrote back in 2001 on “Principles of Participation”. It is three pages and too long to replicate here but many of the principles remain as relevant today as then. A number of principles to keep in mind might be:

- Participation is the fabric from which the clothes of social organisation are woven and represents the basic element of civil society.
- Poor people are the central actors in development, have innate capacities and knowledge and have a right to make decisions about their own lives. Our participatory approaches will seek to centralise poor people in programmes and give them greater choice and more say in addressing their needs or rights.
- We are guided by the fact that participation should be voluntary and not forced or brought about through manipulation.
- Proper participation is dependent on access to information, community awareness raising and being informed. People need to understand and see the actual benefits of participating.
- Where possible we will try to build on what works in communities and work with durable community structures unless they effectively exclude the poor.

BRCiS Community Engagement

Written by Mohamud Rirash, Abdulkadir Moalin, Abdulkadir Ibrahim and Paz Lopez-Rey with input from Finola Mohan



Figure 1: YouthLink and Concern BRCiS staff jointly facilitating Goal Free Communication with Gaheyr community in Wadajir Banadir region, Somalia, 2019. Photo: Hussein.

BRCiS Consortium approach to community engagement

BCiS (Building Resilient Communities in Somalia) Consortium defines resilience as the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. The first 4-year phase of BRCiS between 2013 and 2018 had a consistent focus on building resilience with and for communities. In the second phase (2018–2022), the Consortium members have taken a harmonized approach to community engagement and learning based on the following principles:

- Participant communities co-manage the project with the BRCiS Consortium members through inclusive

Community Resilience Committees and consultation with the wider community.

- BRCiS encourages transformative participation that results in community empowerment to ultimately alter cultural, social structure and institutions that cause marginalization and exclusion. By mandate, BRCiS focuses on the inclusion and participation of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups and communities¹.
- To ensure a qualitative and harmonized approach to community engagement, BRCiS adheres to People-First Impact Methodology (P-FIM). This methodology doesn't start with an already-specified set of questions. In order to truly understand their challenges and existing resilience capacities, BRCiS believes that communication must be goal-free. Community engagement must also be two-way, allowing communities to ask questions and openly express their values and opinions. This methodology helps to build trust and ensure communities' leadership in the identification of risks, vulnerabilities, resilience capacities and context-

¹ Vulnerable groups in the programme include female headed households, people with disabilities, widows/divorced women, child headed households, extreme poor small scale farmers/ small scale business women. While marginalized people are people who are denied and excluded social activities due to their skills and historical backgrounds.



Figure 2: Tula-Adey CRCs, Lifeline Gedo staff and Rirash from Concern BRCIS staff discussing and listing activities in the CAP process March 26, 2019. Tula-Adey in Bardhere district. Photo Abdirahim.

based resilience-building Community Action Plans (CAPs).

- CAPs are adaptive, shock-responsive and unique to the priority shocks and stresses of each community, vulnerabilities and existing resilience capacities. Communities co-lead the design, review, implementation and monitoring of the CAPs and directly contribute to the implementation and sustainability of the project through cash or in-kind contributions.

Inception phase: Building trust through P-FIM, establishing Community Resilience Communities and developing Community Action Plans

Concern is implementing the second phase of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the UK (FCDO)-funded BRCIS programme in four urban districts and five rural districts with four

implementing partners: YouthLink (Banadir), SHACDO (Lower Shabelle) Lifeline Gedo (Gedo) and SOSTA (Awdal).

The inception phase started with an area-level systems mapping and vulnerability community selection matrix prioritization exercise, carried out with the Concern BRCIS programme team, implementing partner staff, community leaders, community committee and local authorities. As a result, 34 vulnerable communities (13 in Gedo, 12 in Lower Shabelle, four in Banadir and five in Awdal regions) were selected as BRCIS participant communities during the inception phase period (October 2018-April 2019).

The programme started community engagement in participant communities with the acceptance of the wider community led by community elders, as the entry point to the communities. Community Task Forces consisting of 25 members (10 female) were established in each community. Task Forces representing different community groups had the mandate to nominate members to the Community Resilience Committee (CRC) consisting of 9-13 members (30% female



Figure 3: People-First Impact Methodology (P-FIM) diagram from the BRCIS Community Engagement Principles and Guidelines.

on average). The inclusion and participation of marginalized and minority groups in the CRCs was encouraged from the onset. For example in Sahan community in Yaqshid district and Bulo-abtiile community in Afgoye district, people with disabilities are prominent members of the newly formed CRC and occupy chair positions. The new CRCs selection process through Task Forces was a time-consuming process that required the definition of roles (Advisors, Influencers, Planners and Innovators) and balancing between traditional leadership and representation of other groups. However, the time invested paid off in terms of CRCs engagement and leadership role in facilitating the CAP process.

BRCIS field team was trained on P-FIM, the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools as well as the community engagement guidance, developed from BRCIS phase 1 lessons learned. Implementing teams found P-FIM exercise and PRA assessments positively influenced active community participation, enthusiasm and critical thinking in the CAP process, as well as encouraging a higher participation of women, particularly in urban communities. As highlighted by BRCIS Consortium Management Unit (CMU) monitoring data, female representation, and leadership in Community Resilience Committees (CRCs) directly contributed to stronger social cohesion within BRCIS Participant Communities. Survey data collected between July 2019 and February



Figure 4: Participatory Rural Appraisal tools used in BRCIS

Advisor (x2-3)	Influencer/ Mobilizer (x3-4)	The Advisor – these are community members who are the keepers of community culture and wisdom. They prioritise community cohesion and are good at solving disputes. These will be your well-respected elders or religious leaders.
Recommended: 1 man and 1 woman	Recommended: 1 man, 1 woman, 1 youth	The Influencer/ Mobilizer – these are your charismatic leaders who the community trusts to guide them. They will be active members of the community with a strong sense of volunteerism who can mobilise people to ‘get stuff done’. They have a strong work ethic and good communication skills.
Innovator (x2-3)	Planner (x2-3)	The Innovator – these are your entrepreneurial creative types that are good at coming up with ideas and solving problems. They are not afraid to try new things and have demonstrated making good investments, understanding value for money.
Recommended: at least 1 youth	Recommended: all must be literate	The Planner – these are your community members who are very organised, have good record keeping skills and understand money management. They are seen as accountable and trustworthy.

Figure 5: Definitions of roles for the Community Resilience Committees

2020, further illustrated an upward trend in community participation with the proportion of households who reported that their community supported their needs rising by almost ten percentage points from 20% to 29%. In addition, a phone survey conducted by MESH covering 750+ CRC members provided strong evidence for strengthened female representation and leadership in the CRCs set up by BRCiS, with more than half (55%) of the leadership positions occupied by female representatives. This finding is also confirmed by programmatic records collected by BRCiS.

Community Action Plans (CAPs) were developed on the basis of P-FIM and PRA exercises with different community groups including elders, business, women, youth and minority groups. P-FIM and PRA prompted reflection on the impacts of the most recurrent shocks and stresses, specific vulnerabilities, existing community resilience capacities and gaps to strengthen community resilience. CRCs led the development of the CAPs with the support and facilitation of BRCiS field teams, in a 10-step process design to allow sufficient trust building, community leadership and critical reflection on the priorities, roles and contributions.

- Step 1. Participatory Community Assessment Synthesis Meeting (2-3 days)
- Step 2. BRCiS team (Concern and partner staff) Critical Review (1 day at office)
- Step 3. Develop Long List of Activities (2-3 days)
- Step 4. Costing of Activities by BRCiS team (1-2 days at office)
- Step 5. Activity Prioritization Meeting (Concern, partner staff and CRC) (2-3 days)
- Step 6. Develop Proposed CAP (1 day at office)
- Step 7. Discuss Proposed CAP (2-4 days)
- Step 8. Community Meeting to Present Proposed CAP (2-3 days)
- Step 9. Finalization of CAP and endorsement with district authorities
- Step 10. Display of CAPs in the community and implementation.

Community Action Plans review and adaptation

CAP are living documents that are iterative and adaptive, allowing for the review of interventions based on changes in context, outcome of technical assessments or redefinition of priorities. CAPs are therefore adapted on an ad-hoc basis per community and reviewed annually. The CAP review processes enable a reflection with target communities on what worked well and what did not work so well, what changes are necessary to adapt to the context, new opportunities and capacities, how the CAP interventions can be more sustainable and what innovations and learning can improve resilience outcomes. The annual CAP revision that was planned for April 2020 required extensive engagement with communities in-situ and was therefore postponed due to Covid-19 movement and social gathering restrictions. It is now planned to take place early in 2021.

However, since the start of CAPs implementation, various adaptations have occurred in anticipation or in response to diverse shocks. For example, Technical Vocational Skills training planned for 434 youth in the CAPs of four urban communities in Mogadishu was deprioritized to reallocate funding for multipurpose cash-based assistance to mitigate the livelihoods impact of COVID-19 on 5,008 urban and rural extremely vulnerable households. Three rounds of P-FIM exercises have also been used to better understand communities' perceptions on COVID-19, priorities and best approaches for prevention, informing BRCiS COVID-19 mitigation programming.

Shock responsive Community Action Plans

BRCiS programme is adaptive and shock-responsive: addressing short-term humanitarian needs and the longer-term



Figure 6: CRC Yaaqduub community having sensitization meeting and the collection of long list of activities Mohamud, and Abdihakim from SHACDO staff. Photo Hassan Daud SHACDO, March-2019

aim of building community and household capacities to deal with the shocks and stresses that drive those humanitarian needs in the first place.

In line with the BRCiS community-centred approach to Early Warning and Early Action, Concern piloted the design of CAPs that considered not only long-term mitigation and resilience-building activities but also community-led early action and early response to shocks, such as community preparedness measures ahead of riverine flood (protecting livelihood assets, moving to higher grounds, etc.).

Whilst building communities' capacities to reduce their exposure and vulnerability to shocks, Concern also provides immediate humanitarian assistance to targeted communities and neighbouring communities affected shocks in order to mitigate their impact and protect resilience gains. BRCiS early warning system, which triangulates primary community and area-level data with secondary data sources at district level, allows evidence-based triggering of early action and early response to shock events as well the prioritization of most at risk areas. As a result, since the beginning of the programme, interventions have been adapted to mitigate the impact of drought,

riverine floods, flash floods, locust and Covid-19 through a range of early action and response interventions including cash-based assistance, shock-responsive safety nets, community water vouchers and disease prevention measures. These interventions were implemented timely through the BRCiS programme contingency fund for early action and were scaled up by the BRCiS Crisis Modifier.

Additionally, some CAP interventions were reviewed and re-prioritized to provide life-saving interventions such cash transfers and safety-net top-ups. Community Resilience Committees play a key role in the identification and prioritization of shock early actions, targeting of vulnerable households, mobilization for implementation and community contribution, as well as in the monitoring of activities and dissemination of the complaints response mechanism (CRM). Capacity of communities has been built through the programme, but for major shocks such as floods, major droughts etc it may still be necessary to seek external assistance. However, it is expected that the BRCiS long-term interventions (such as water supply access, savings groups, improved climate smart agricultural practices, fodder market availability) will have improved coping capacities for communities to be less vulnerable to minor shocks such as one failed rainy season.

CAPS co-management and contribution

The co-management of CAPs and community contributions to CAP implementation are approaches aiming to create transformative change, empower communities and strengthen ownership and sustainability. The community directly contributes to the cost of most CAP activities, either directly through cash contributions (for contractor based activities such as new water supply infrastructure) or in-kind, for example through labour hours for community works, which match cash for work contributions from the programme. In the period April - September 2020 the 34 participant communities provided a direct contribution of \$58,000 USD to CAP implementation, confirming ownership and relevance of the CAPs and enhancing BRCiS programme value for money.

Community Conversations for Health and Social Behaviour Change - Kenya Research

Written by Brynne Gilmore

Introduction

Concern Worldwide Kenya in partnership with Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, undertook a two-year operations research project to understand ‘how, why and for whom’ Community Conversations (CCs) can work for behaviour change. CCs have been widely implemented across numerous Concern Worldwide locations, and have been a core component of Concern in Kenya’s Community Engagement strategy since 2009. Currently, Concern supports over 300 CCs across four counties in Kenya. Marsabit County, an arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) located in Northern Kenya, has 188 CC groups alone.

Rationale/Justification

The CCs within Kenya are often used for topics related to social behaviour change, particularly around health behaviours. Despite the widespread use of CCs and other types of community engagement strategies for behaviour change, there is little documented evidence on their effectiveness or how they work (1). Existing theories on how and why engagement programmes lead to positive health behaviours have largely been developed in high-income contexts; such theories are rarely developed from community-based, lower-middle income country (LMIC) settings and therefore do not account for varying contextual conditions within which these programmes occur. These inadequate theorisations and the lack of explanatory evidence contribute to a

global knowledge gap. Understanding *how* engagement programmes operate in their specific contexts and *why* they ultimately deliver positive health behaviours, remains a widely under-researched area of study.



Figure 1: A community conversations dialogue session in Laisamis, Marsabit County, 2019. Photo: Irene Gumato.

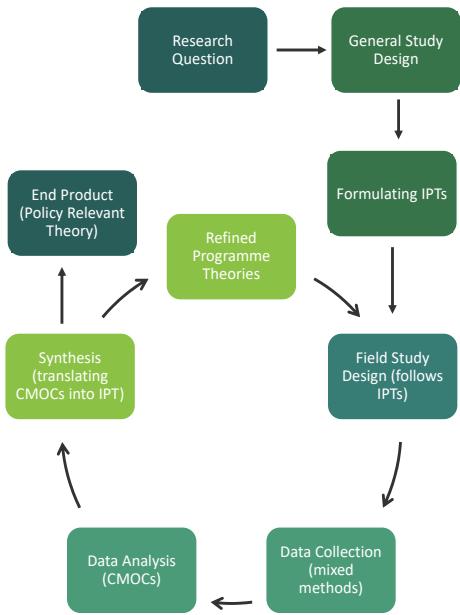


Figure 2: Realist evaluation process

A stronger evidence-base is necessary to design, implement and support successful CC strategies across different contexts. Concern in Kenya is particularly interested in this research question, as the evidence generated will be used to support their programme scale-up and to assist in knowledge transfer between other Concern country programmes. This research project therefore asks, *'How do Community Conversation programmes implemented by Concern Worldwide Kenya contribute to improved behaviours in Marsabit County?'*

Research Methodology

Realist evaluation

This research used realist evaluation methodology, a form of theory driven evaluation which aims to understand 'what worked, for whom, why and in what contexts' (2). This methodology aims to identify theories for how these programmes work,

and then test or refine these theories through more data gathering.

Realist evaluation works under the principle of generative causation, that is that outcomes don't just occur within interventions. Outcomes are the result of specific 'contexts' triggering 'mechanisms' (participant reactions and responses to the context), and together this combination (of Context and Mechanism) generate outcomes. To understand generative causation, realist evaluation wants to find the combination of these, called 'context-mechanism-outcome configurations' (CMOCs).

Realist evaluations start by articulating how, why and for whom we (and programme designers) think change is happening, and call these Initial Programme Theories (IPTs). These IPTs are then refined by collecting data through case studies. The data is analysed to find generative causation (CMOCs) which are then synthesized into the IPTs to identify more contextually relevant programme theories (PTs).

Realist evaluation is an iterative process, meaning the process can go through multiple rounds of data collection, with each time our theory is getting more and more refined and specific. Figure 1 highlights the realist process and more details on data analysis and refinement can be found here (3).

Study design and location:

This study consisted of four case studies using mixed methods. Each of the case studies addressed a different behaviour change topic, as noted below.

- Laisamis – Handwashing at four critical times
- North Horr– Appropriate careseeking for sick children under-5
- Saku – Men's participation in caring for children under-5
- Sololo – Gendered division of labour in the household

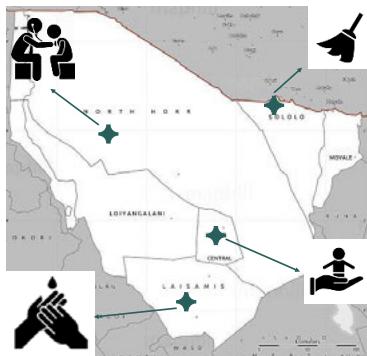


Figure 3: Study design and location showing the behaviours investigated at each case study location.

Survey – baseline and endline

To explore changes in behaviour, a survey was conducted in each community the CCs represent at baseline (after Step 4 in CC cycle ‘Decision-Making’), and endline (12 months after the CC group had entered into Step 5 ‘Action’). The survey had five key components using Concern standard indicators: 1) Demographics of respondent; 2) Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) (*different for each CC depending on behaviour change topic*); 3) Self Efficacy; 4) Community Efficacy; 5) CC Exposure. All eligible participants in the communities were invited to participate at both timepoints.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

To understand the CC process and how the CCs contributed to behaviour change (or didn’t), qualitative interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted at two different timepoints across all 4 CC case studies¹.

Individual interviews consisted of key community stakeholders, including Community Development Facilitators, Community Facilitators, Community Conversation members, Community Leaders and Community Health Volunteers. FGDs were comprised of community members, divided by gender.

Other data sources

To support a better understanding of the survey and interview findings, observations and field notes were developed over 2 year period, Concern Kenya CC documents and CC meeting minutes were reviewed.

¹. The original plan was to conduct a third round of interviews after the endline data was analysed, but due to COVID-19 this has been postponed.



Research Findings

Survey findings²

With the exception of handwashing in Laisamis, the survey results did not show statistically significant improvements in behaviours across the four case study locations. However, scores for either self-efficacy or community efficacy did show statistically significant improvements in all of the four areas. The results from the surveys are summarised as follows:

Laisamis- Handwashing at four critical times

- Knowledge of 3+ causes and preventers of diarrhoeal disease
- Knowledge of at least 3 of 5 critical times for handwashing
- Adequate handwashing station
- Fewer number of children sick with diarrhoea in last 2 weeks
- Correct handwashing practice observed
- Soap or ash used for handwashing in the last two days
- Participants' average scores on self efficacy increased significantly
- But not community efficacy

North Horr - Appropriate careseeking for sick children under-5

- Participants' average scores on self efficacy increased significantly
- Participants' average scores on community efficacy increased significantly
- No significant findings on careseeking behaviours. However, low numbers of cases can obscure statistically significant results. Therefore it is not possible to say for sure that there was no change in relation to the indicators with such small numbers

Saku - Men's participation in child-care

- No change in gender role attitudes
- No change in men's dominance in decision making
- No change in men's participation in childcare
- Participants' average scores on self efficacy increased significantly
- Participants' average scores on community efficacy increased significantly

Sololo - Gendered division of labour in the household

- No change in gender role attitudes
- No change in percentage of labour share by men and women
- No change in self efficacy
- Participants' average scores on community efficacy increased significantly

Qualitative findings

Participants

137 individuals participated in either FGD or individual interviews across the four sites at two different timepoints. 71 of these occurred across 10 FGDs, and the remaining 66 people were interviewed individually. Table 1 below highlights the total numbers per site and round.

	Round 1 participants	Round 2 participants	Total participants	
Site	FGDs	Individual Interviews	Individual interviews	
Laisamis	20 (2 FGDs)	5	10	35
North Horr	16 (2 FGDs)	6	8	30
Saku	16 (2 FGDs)	7	8	31
Sololo	29 (4 FGDs)	4	8	41
Total			137	

Table 1: Participants of Focus Group Discussions and individual interviews

Findings from the interviews, FGDs, observations and document reviews are summarised below.

². Bivariate analyses were used to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences in the indicators of interest between Time 1 (baseline) and Time 2 (endline). Statistical significance here means that the association identified would be very unlikely to occur (less than a 5% chance) if there was no real difference between the groups.

Key Themes

While each case study had some specific and unique qualitative findings, there were some common themes across the four case studies. Overall, participants were very receptive to the CCs and extremely supportive of their continuation.

Commitment as community duty: The vast majority of respondents attend and contribute to CCs out of an internal motivation to improve their community. Individuals often noted feeling a sense of duty to their community.

Conversations as open space: While the specific behaviours were addressed in some capacity across all groups, these were not a main focus of the CCs. CCs provide an opportunity and space for community members to meet to discuss all types of concerns and events. A strong focus on one or more specific topics (like the behaviours addressed here), was not common, except in the case of Laisamis.

Knowledge acquisition: individuals place great value on what knowledge and experience they can learn from the CCs. Members attend meetings with the aim of leaving more prepared or knowledgeable on important topics for themselves, their families and their community.

Positive motivation: CCs and the individuals within them are often driven to continue engaging when they see the positive benefit CCs can bring. This may be in the form of resource acquisition (i.e. organising solar panels) or direct benefits from their behaviour change action (i.e. more handwashing stations in communities).

Partnerships and linkages in communities:

In most sites, multiple community activities are on-going, ranging from other community engagement type groups (i.e. women's groups) and saving and loans groups, to health dialogue days and community health worker visits. Supporting these partnerships

is very important to link key services, improve continuity and leveraging outside knowledge and support.

Partnerships and linkages in implementation: The CCs deal with varying topics and may require support (i.e. training) throughout their implementation cycle. CCs may be led by the Community Empowerment Team, but it is essential that all Concern programmes feed into their implementation relative to the teams' specific topic. It is also important that the CCs have access to other implementation partners, such as Ministry of Health (MoH) staff, during key information sessions to support knowledge acquisition and to legitimise the Conversation's efforts.

Levels of behaviour and complexity: Not all behaviour change can be approached the same way. More discrete behaviour change (i.e. handwashing) that has straightforward actions and visual cue reminders are likely more straightforward and less time intensive. More complex behaviours such as careseeking, which involve not only changing an individual response but also dealing with issues of access and resources, may be well received by individuals but difficult to implement. Lastly, more socially or culturally transformative behaviours, such as those dealing with gender, likely require a great deal of technical capacity from Concern and long time periods to allow for change.



Figure 4: Development actors attending a community stakeholders' forum to discuss and develop synergies in addressing community development priorities in Maikona, Marsabit County, 2019. Photo: Halkano Dekama.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Overall, CCs had mixed results in how they work to change behaviours. Only one of the CC groups (handwashing) was able to positively change key aspects of a behaviour during the 12-month intervention. However, many other findings from this research indicate CC's positive role within communities.

Notably, all case studies saw an increase in self-efficacy and/or community-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an important precursor for anyone wanting to change behaviour, as it facilitates goal-setting, effort investment, persistence in the face of challenges and recovery from setbacks. The increased community efficacy reflects the CC's ability to promote a sense of belief in one's community.

The behaviours of study varied substantially, from more 'discrete' behaviours (handwashing), to more complex (care-seeking) and more socially transformative (gender relations and roles). Findings from this study should be interpreted with caution, especially for gender roles, as likely these social changes require more time. It may be that CCs are more suited to having an immediate benefit from very tangible, discrete, behaviour change interventions, such as handwashing.

Key recommendations emerging from this study in relation to CCs and behaviour change are:

- Training/education should be regularly integrated into CCs, supported by an experienced partner.

- Open space within the conversations is important to allow community needs to surface, but if working on a specific behaviour more structure or planning in terms of addressing the topic should be incorporated to ensure it is adequately addressed.
- Stronger links within other Concern programmes (eg Health, Livelihoods, Education) is required to holistically and adequately implement CCs. Links with other key stakeholders (i.e. Community Health Workers, Ministry of Health) should be facilitated and supported.
- Cultural and socially transformative topics (e.g. gender) should be approached with extreme caution. Existing CC resources (training tools, exercise, staffing capacity) may not be sufficient to ethically and responsibly support these conversation topics.

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The Community Conversations Approach to Community Empowerment: Experience from Kenya

Written by Zacheous Nguku Mutunga

Overview of Community Conversations

Definition

Community Conversations (CCs) are facilitated community dialogues where members of a community come together and discuss the causes of their under-development, arrive at resolutions and plan for and implement actions to change their situation. It is a participatory approach that gives voice to the community where they are involved in identifying their own needs and play a part in finding their own solutions.

Background

Community Conversations as an approach was first used as a tool to address behaviour change for HIV/AIDS prevention. The approach was broadened to include a set of tools that empowers communities to analyse broader and complex socio-economic and

cultural issues that require collective action. The approach is implemented through facilitated village conversations, using a set of participative learning and action tools.

Objective:

The main objective of community conversations is to stimulate and sustain changes from within. This is achieved through generating genuine individual and collective community concerns through shared analysis of social systems and structures responsible for challenges facing the community. The 'final destination' of CCs is to have an empowered community that is capable to make sustained changes through its own actions.

Guiding principles:

The belief that communities have the capacity to unpack their own problems, make decisions on their own solutions and implement their own actions.



Figure 1: Community members in a school score card session in Kalacha primary school, Marsabit County, 2019. Photo: Richard Issacko.

Community Conversations in Kenya

In 2011, Concern adopted Community Conversations as a social transformation approach and the foundation for its cross-sectoral programming in Kenya. Through this, Concern sought to achieve a people-centred approach to programming; an approach that demands Concern to respond to community based priorities. It recognises that people's lives, problems, and priorities are multi-dimensional requiring a package of multi sectoral responses. The people-centred approach recognises the critical importance of poor people's participation, involvement, and contribution to humanitarian and development solutions. It builds programmatic outcomes on a platform of human rights, helping poor people to understand their rights, how to constructively demand them, and importantly, it builds the capacity of government to understand and fulfil their obligation to poor people.

Concern places poor people at the forefront of its work. It embeds processes into its programming approach that enable them to prioritise their own needs and drive their own development. It increases community based capacity to articulate emergency and development needs to government and development actors; it galvanizes communities to reduce dependency on outside intervention and identify local resources to make local changes; it creates linkages enabling communities to communicate their emergency and development needs and solutions.

Since 2011 Concern has implemented the approach in seven Counties in Kenya namely Nairobi, Marsabit, Kisumu, Homabay, Migori, Tana River and Turkana. Using the CC methodology, Concern has established 331 organised community groups¹ as platforms of community engagement.



Figure 2: Community Conversation Framework

Community Conversations experience in key outcome areas

Increasing citizen capacity to pursue accountability in service provision

The Community Conversations approach has been instrumental in increasing citizen capacity to pursue accountability. Between 2015 and 2019, communities have developed and submitted 135 petitions to governance structures for improvement in various service delivery; 42% of the submitted petitions were acted upon by government. To promote mutual accountability for quality education, community groups linked to 11 schools and their Boards of Management (BOMs), teachers, and parents facilitated social

¹ Originally these groups were named 'Community Conversations groups' but later it was decided to use the term 'organised community groups' instead. This change was necessary because the CC methodology was used in some cases with groups that were already formed for other purposes instead of forming an entirely new group. Both terms 'Community Conversations group' and 'organised groups' are used in this article interchangeably.

accountability forums. The immediate outcomes of these forums were the identification of gaps and development of remedial actions to improve quality of education in these schools. To improve the quality of service delivery on health, 34 communities have lobbied government to construct, equip and operationalise 17 health facilities while 47 communities petitioned government departments to address identified gaps in service delivery.

Role of CC in CC enhancing health service delivery

Realising the importance of empowering households and communities in the delivery of the Kenya Essential Package for Health (KEPH) at level 1 (community), the Ministry of Health and sector partners developed and launched a Community Health Strategy (CHS) in 2006. The strategy outlined the type of services to be provided at level 1, the type of human resources required to deliver and support level 1 services.

The overall goal of the strategy was to enhance community access to health care in order to improve individual productivity and thus reduce poverty, hunger, and child and maternal deaths, as well as improve education performance. This was to be accomplished by establishing sustainable level 1 services as well as enhanced accountability and responsibility among all concerned partners.

The design of the strategy requires that the workforce, specifically the Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) should be identified and selected by the community members. The Ministry of Health implemented the strategy by liaising with chiefs' barazas² to identify and select the CHVs but this had a lot of demerit as it lacked ownership among the communities and there was low motivation among the CHVs.

²: A public community meeting led by a local administrator to discuss issues affecting the community



Figure 3: 'Okoa Trolley' – a modified trolley for ferrying sick people to hospital through narrow streets in urban slums. An initiative and project by the Korogocho community conversations in Nairobi County, 2020. Photo: James Mwangi.

In light of these gaps, Concern Worldwide in partnership with the Ministry of Health used CC to engage communities in identification and selection of CHS workforce. With technical guidance from Ministry officials, communities developed terms of reference and contributed resources to support the training agreed on a motivation package for the workforce and a tripartite agreement between the workforce, community and Ministry was developed to sustain ownership and functionality of the system. The outcome of this engagement was the establishment and operationalization of thirteen Community Health Strategy Units in Marsabit.

Role of CC in Inclusion:

One of the important attributes of community empowerment is inclusion, whereby communities work toward achieving inclusion and active participation of its segments. The Community Conversations principles and concepts advocate for inclusion of community segments (women, men, youth, leaders,

vulnerable groups, literate, illiterate etc.) in decision-making and development processes. To achieve this, Concern engaged communities using participatory tools to facilitate communities to map different segments and develop databases in minute books kept by the community based facilitators. By mid-2020, 240 of the 311 organised community groups had developed databases of vulnerable segments in the community. These databases were essential for ensuring inclusion in community engagement and for selection of beneficiaries for various interventions, including emergencies.

Role of CC in reducing harmful social cultural practices and inequitable power relations:

The approach has been successful in engaging different community segments including men, women, community champions and customary leaders to critically analyse harmful cultural practices such as child marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and gender roles and labour division. In Marsabit County, a continuous engagement since 2013 resulted in the denouncement of female genital mutilation and underage marriages by the Borana customary leadership in 2020. In addition to denouncement of FGM, the customary leadership made a declaration for the protection of children, especially girls, equal education for both boys and girls, and protection of wildlife.

To address heavy workloads for women and girls, the programme has engaged communities to analyse gender roles and division of labour using the 24-hour tool.³

³. The 24-hour tool or Daily Activity Clock exercise asks men and women to separately plot out their typical activities over a 24 hour period. After they are completed, the men's clock and the women's clock can be compared to show the differences in the relative workloads of men and women, boys and girls. Comparisons between clocks show who works the longest hours, who concentrates on a few activities and who does a number of tasks in a day. It also shows who has the most leisure time and time to sleep



Figure 4: Dialogue session with community customary leaders to discuss harmful cultural practices such as female genital cutting and early marriages in Marsabit County, 2019. Photo: Umuro Buke.

An immediate outcome of administering the 24-hour tool was the realisation that women and girls bear a heavier burden of household chores compared to men and boys hindering their participation in development. As a result, communities held in-depth discussions and resolved to adopt various initiatives to assist in reducing workload for women and girls. For example, in most communities men resolved to use motorbikes for water and firewood collection to ease workload for their spouses to allow them more time for childcare and other productive engagements. Actions taken by communities to give girls enough time to concentrate on studies included limiting home chores in the evenings to allow time for study and homework, and equal sharing of home chores among boys and girls.

On issues of gender-based violence, a study of a CC conducted in 2016, found that 24% of the CC sample and 21% of the resonance sample (those who live in a CC community but are not members of CC group) reported that it was never acceptable to hit a woman. This result was much better than the comparison sample (those who live in communities where CC groups were non-existent) for which only 5% of respondents reported the same.

The role of CC in strengthening local ownership and indigenous leadership:

One of the critical components of empowerment is the ability of communities to demonstrate local ownership and leadership in development. To achieve this, the programme utilised Community Conversations to mobilize 312 organised community groups to identify and analyse development priorities and take initiatives to address the identified pressing development priorities. From 2015 to 2019, communities implemented action plans worth 118,529,090 Kenyan shillings (KES) (€913,794) using locally mobilized resources. In 2020, Communities developed 355 action plans valued at KES 574,742,100 (€4,511,350) to respond to various identified needs. Of the 355 action plans, 85 of them worth KES 2,122,100 (€16,657) were supported using community resources. Building on their empowerment, communities mapped various development actors and engaged them to support implementation of 118 community action plans worth KES 14,450,000 (€113,423). The majority of these implemented action plans were for the provision of, or improving access to basic services such as water, health and education. The community action plans also helped stakeholders and county government to respond to communities' priorities and build a 'bottom-up' approach in building the resilience of the targeted communities.

Role of CC in enhancing community resilience through disaster risk reduction initiatives

The use of Community Conversations has proved effective in facilitating implementation of projects based on community felt needs and priorities. The process is extremely participatory and marked with high sense of ownership. According to Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), effective Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) initiatives should lead to improved security and good governance, economic and social development, food and water security, and



Figure 5: Ramole community in Marsabit County working on a trench for water piping from a borehole to their village as part of their Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plan in 2020. Photo: Rob Galgallo

environmental sustainability. CCs have actively engaged in advocacy, engaging county government to addresses particular initiatives that reduced impacts of drought on community livelihoods, increased need based pro-poor resource allocation, early warning messaging, both as the medium of knowledge but also in initiating mitigating actions against known disasters. In Marsabit, these processes have been incorporated in the county planning and budgeting process where communities lobby for incorporation of community contingency plans in county planning. In 2019 and 2020, community conversations identified common and emerging risks. They then developed and implemented thirteen Ward Drought Risk Reduction plans.

The role of CC in Citizen Engagement and participation

An important objective of the CC approach is to give the community voice and have governance structures listen to that voice. Chapter one of the constitution of Kenya 2010 recognizes citizen participation in government decision making as

fundamental to the functionality of any governance system. County Government Act Section 91 further mandates the County government to facilitate the establishment of modalities and platforms for citizen participation. Since 2015, Concern has utilised the CC approach to both engage and strengthen the community and County Government structures for enhanced citizen participation. Concern sensitized 188 community groups in Marsabit on the county budget cycle, citizen's social, political and economic rights and roles in civic life. With this increased knowledge of county governance processes and ability to voice their concerns, 139 communities have continually and actively engaged County Government each year in County decision making processes including County budget planning. Concern has collaborated with the County government and built the capacity of administrators to engage communities in decision-making processes. As a result, community priorities worth KES 191,940,000 (€1,478,187) have been incorporated in County planning from 2015 to 2020.

Using Community Resilience Vision Statements to Engage Communities in Bangladesh

Written by Ohidul Islam and Shahen Ahamed

Concern Worldwide Bangladesh is implementing the Flood Resilience Project, with funding support from the Zurich Foundation. The Project is working with 22 communities of Hatibandha Upazila in Lalmonirhat District and Sundarganj Upazila in Gaibandha District in the North-Western regions of Bangladesh in partnership with local implementing partner Assistance for Social Organization and Development (ASOD). This area of the country is known for its ever-changing Char (riverine islands), which are highly susceptible to erosion and severe flooding. A fragile physical environment, limited access to services and public institutions, highly variable incomes and remoteness all contribute to the vulnerability of Char communities, which is then compounded by the almost yearly impacts of monsoon flooding. The Flood Resilience Project focuses on pre-event resilience building for communities who are most vulnerable to the impacts of floods.

The Project is working towards achieving the goal of “Floods having no negative impacts on people’s and businesses’ ability to thrive”. The project emphasizes the increased understanding of flood resilience for communities and the enhancement of their voices in developing flood risk informed resilience actions. The project uses the Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities (FRMC) tool, which was developed by The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (ZFRA) to engage the communities in understanding floods and developing

resilience building action plans through a participatory and holistic approach. This article aims to share the process of community engagement and lessons learned from the process through sharing the projects team’s insights who have been closely engaged in the process.

The use of FRMC gives the community, stakeholders and project staff an understanding of the current resilience status of a community and enables them to develop participatory risk informed resilience actions. Therefore, it is important to engage the participating communities effectively. This is being done through the following methods:

Orientation of the communities and stakeholders

At the beginning, the project conducted a series of inception meetings and project orientation meetings with the respective unions, municipality, and Upazila¹ administration staff, in order to orient them to the project objectives and process and include their perceptions from the very beginning. This level of wide stakeholder engagement will be continued in all stages of the project. From the beginning, this engagement proved fruitful as these stakeholders immediately identified

¹. Upazilas are equivalent to sub-districts in Bangladesh



Figure 1: Community identifying their problem for developing vision statement, Haripur Sundarganj, Gaibandha, 2019. Photo: Md. Moktar Hossain (ASOD).

potential challenges in the proposed rollout of activities, which were then amended. The communities initially identified that their main challenges were lackings in areas such as financial support, knowledge, insufficient government assistance, good governance, investment coordination, leadership etc.

completed wellbeing and context analysis, social structure, community vulnerability mapping, resource mapping alongside identifying challenges. While conducting the PRAs, the frontline staff collected information of community leaders from different groups, who contributed to wider community engagement.

Shared understanding of flood risk and vulnerability

Various participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques are being used in order for both community members, duty bearers and project staff to gain a full understanding of the flood resilience status of each community. The project team conducted social mapping and wellbeing analysis with the communities, dividing the community into different small groups. Through this process, the whole community was engaged with the project planning and the community developed an understanding of the project goal and objectives. Through engagement with the community, the project team has

Following this, the project held a meeting to conduct a community historical scan and issue mapping. Historical scans were conducted by asking the community to think back to 15-20 years prior and consider all of the flooding events in the community and prepare a historical timeline, noting specific key attributes of each flooding event and to focus on those attributes that are deemed most impactful to the group. For example during the 2010 floods, significant river erosion occurred leading to the loss of farmland. After the historical scan, the same group did the issue mapping. The process for this was that each group identified a key issue that they considered to be of relevance to the flooding risk they experienced and

explored what this looks like, how to solve it, who is engaged and what their various roles are. Each group identified the key points from the discussions, noting which events were most impactful to the community and when, what was the principal issue, and who was involved in that. Completing both exercises culminated in the preparation of a Community Resilience Vision Statement for each of the 22 communities. This was achieved with the active participation of community leaders, community members, respective Union Council Chairman, Union Parishad (UP) members, Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC) members, elites, and people from all occupations.

Developing Community Flood Resilience Vision

The communities recognized that floods are a natural phenomenon, they cannot stop them, nor change them, but can adapt their own behaviour and prepare themselves in a manner that reduces the impacts on the community and through this process,

they can build their flood resilience. Based on the shared understanding of the risk and vulnerabilities to the flooding, each of the communities developed a vision of where they wanted to see their community in terms of flood resilience in five years' time. The communities each made a list of the problems in their community while creating their vision. From that list, they make a shortlist of the issues that are most important to them and based on that, the community determined their vision elements through numerous arguments. From these vision elements, the communities prepared their vision statements. These vision statements provided grounding for the FRMC survey.

The FRMC process is complex and requires a holistic appraisal of a community to determine its flood resilience. It was found that grounding the communities' understanding of their flood resilience in the vision statements was useful, and necessary, to explain the complex process and continuously remind all stakeholders of the purpose of the work.



Figure 2: Group work on community feedback, Sundarganj Gaibandha, 2019. Photo: Md. Ohidul Islam.



Figure 3: Community Action Plan preparation, Dakhin Sindurna, Hatibandha, Lalmonirhat, 2019.

Photo: Md. Ohidul Islam.

Sharing FRMC findings and facilitating community led flood resilience action plan

Using the FRMC, the project team collected information from the communities and relevant stakeholders using household surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and secondary sources of information. It was important that this process was as community-led as possible, otherwise it ran the risk of becoming an overly-extractive process.

In the analysis process, the FRMC study findings were analysed against the components of the community resilience vision statements. Before receiving feedback, the whole FRMC process was explained to community people so that they could understand the FRMC results and could relate the results to their vision statements. After completing analysis and grading of the collected data, the project shared the FRMC study results with the respective communities to receive feedback again. During sharing of the FRMC results, agreement and disagreements arose over the results and where necessary some communities redefined their vision statements.

To ensure that all community members were aware of the results of the data they provided

for the FRMC and were able to engage in developing the community resilience action plan, there were voluntary groups called Community Resilience Action Groups (CRAGs) selected from each of the communities. The volunteer groups discussed the FRMC results with their community, dividing them into small groups to ensure greater representation. The project considered all the feedback to finalise the results and 22 communities' vision statements. At the end of this process, communities had prepared their Community Resilience Action Plan through engaging a wide variety of participants from the community. Project staff facilitated the process at the community level and documented the Community Actions Plans, but all the inputs came from the community members themselves. Communities are now implementing their interventions and monitoring of their progress is ongoing.

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting movement restrictions in Bangladesh threatened the programme implementation. However, effective community engagement in rolling out the programme plan helped to mitigate some of the suffering and disruptions to public life caused by the pandemic combined with the 2020 monsoon floods. Community Resilience Action Group members from 22 communities were oriented on Covid-19 by

Flood Resilience Project staff and they formed volunteer groups consisting of five people in each group. These groups disseminated Covid-19 messages throughout their communities, and helped to lower the risk of Covid-19 transmission through the support and coordination with the Union Council, the Upazila health complex, and the Flood Resilience Project. The CRAGs delivered awareness messages to 47,532 people (23,376 men and 24,156 women) in 22 communities.

At the same time, they identified the most vulnerable households in the community and advocated with the Union Council to include them in the Union Council relief programme. Engaging with the Union Council, Upazila Administration and the project, the CRAGs were able to identify the more vulnerable households based on agreed criteria and avoid overlapping. After the end of the lockdown, the CRAGs of Hatibandha and Sundarganj Upazila organized joint planning with the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) and the Upazila Livestock Department. This planning helped to ensure safe drinking water to the flood-affected people. DPHE provided water purification tablets, tube-well, and community latrines to the flood-affected people. Sundarganj Community Resilience Action Group with Upazila Health Complex jointly organized health camps in four unions of Flood Resilience Project area and were able to serve 717 men and 953 women with medicine support in the 2020 flood event.

Nich Sheikh Sundar Community Resilience Action Group and Nich Sekhsundar community in Hatibandha Upazila undertook an initiative to repair a road that had been damaged by the 2020 flood. Community Action Group leaders in their role as Union Disaster Management Committee members raised the damaged road issue in the Sanizan Union Disaster Committee meeting and based on that meeting, the Union Chairman paid a visit to the community and held a meeting with the CRAG and the community. In that meeting, the community estimated the budget for repairing the road and formed a committee for budget collection along with an implementing committee. Following this, the community successfully collected the required budget and repaired the road. These activities show early successes in the adoption and roll out of the Community Action Plan.

Key lessons learned:

1. Engaging the communities and stakeholders from the very beginning of the project is beneficial to contextualise the resilience actions.
2. Community ownership and long-term community vision is helpful for resilience building.
3. Bottom-up and risk-informed flood resilience action planning through effective engagement of the community is possible.
4. Community-specific vision statements help create effective action plans to increase resilience building in the community.



Figure 4:
Community
meeting with
Chairman for
repairing road,
Nich Sekhsundar,
Hatibandha,
Lalmonirhat, 2020.
Photo: Momtaz
 Begum (ASOD).

Engaging communities through Change Makers in Bangladesh

Written by Mausumi Sharmin

Concern has been implementing the 'Improving Lives of Urban Extreme Poor – ILUEP' programme in Bangladesh since 2017. The five-year programme (2017 – 2021) aims to improve the livelihood security and increase the resilience to shocks of 9,000 extreme poor households living in undeveloped slums, squatter settlements and on the pavements in Dhaka and Chattogram City Corporations (approximately 30,000 direct beneficiaries). The programme is implemented through three implementing partners and five strategic/technical partners, and engages more than 30 other stakeholders from the Government and private, NGO and Civil Society Organisation (CSO).

ILUEP aims to:

1. Increase assets and the return on assets by providing livelihood (skills, apprenticeship, private sector employment opportunities, micro enterprise, savings and loans and block grants) and nutrition support (nutrition advice, mother support groups, activating ward health committees and establishing child day care)
2. Reduce inequality by addressing the patriarchal norms that restrict women from taking control over their lives and their own resources; and advocating with government duty bearers to deliver essential basic services such as health, education, clean water,

sanitation and social safety nets to meet the entitlements of the extreme poor.

3. Reduce risk and vulnerability of women and girls to violent attacks and to reduce morbidity and mortality from environmental diseases and HIV and AIDS. The ILUEP programme employs a number of different approaches to engaging men and boys in the fight for gender equality that operate at micro, meso and macro levels.

The Change Maker Approach

The programme teams identified key community members known as Change Makers to act as gender champions and advocates within their communities. Partner staff first identified people who displayed the ideal characteristics of Change Makers (people who have social acceptance, who are respectful of women's rights and who display a voluntary attitude to contribute) in other groups of which they were already members. These potential Change Makers were approached and the programme explained to them, including the time commitments, after which they were free to self-select to attend training to become Change Makers.



Maya and Kamal: Husband (Kamal) and wife (Maya) feeding their small child, using positive parenting techniques. They are breaking down the traditional gender roles and implementing gender equal parenting. They learnt about positive parenting in the gender transformational training in their community by Nari Maitree, an implementation partner of Concern Worldwide. Masterbari slum Lalbag, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2019. Photo: Maksuda Akter / Nari Maitree.

A total of 115 male and 190 female Change Makers received a three-day gender transformative training from partner staff¹ that they used to launch discussions on early marriage, joint decision-making and gender-based violence (GBV). They visit 5-10 households per month with messages on the importance of non-violent attitudes between couples and towards children, early marriage, and sexual harassment.

¹ Sonke trained Concern staff using the Breaking the Barriers manual and in turn, Concern staff trained the partners SEEP, Sajida Foundation, and Nari Maitree. The manual and other information, education and communication (IEC) materials were translated into Bangla and using pictorial forms to ease understanding for the participants.

They also make use of tea stalls² that are gathering places for this kind of discussion by men in Bangladesh, while communal kitchens are usually where women are engaged. Public bathing places are also used by the Change Makers to have discussions with men and women separately. Within their communities, Change Makers have become known as a point of contact for issues related to domestic violence, sexual harassment and stopping child marriage. Change Makers receive a refresher training on gender transformation annually.

Change Makers are gradually taking on more responsibility to disseminate their training learnings to programme participants through regular Self Help Groups³ meetings and mother support groups, parents and sibling sessions, and adolescent sessions.

Impact

It has been seen that the impact the Change Makers are having is spreading beyond their immediate efforts and programme staff have testified that men and women programme participants beside the Change

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- 2. In Bangladesh, tea stalls are informal gathering places, usually for men to spend some time relaxing and to discuss current political issues, community problem or personal problem with peers in their location. It is common for decisions about what happens in the community to be made by men during these discussions at tea stalls, and as such, they are an important format to engage in for successful programme implementation. There is anecdotal evidence from the programme staff that the male Change Makers are using these conversations at tea stalls to discourage boys and young men from sexual harassment and teasing of girls that is known to reduce girls' attendance at school.
 - 3. Self Help Groups (SHGs) are a feature of the programme where men and women participants come together and conduct a rotational savings scheme. The SHGs discuss the use of the block grants (from the Graduation programme). They also discuss other issues such as nutrition, diet and food preparation. The SHGs are used as entry points for topics such as hygiene promotion, menstrual hygiene, HIV and AIDS transmission awareness and the use of IEC materials for gender awareness.

Makers have started gender transformative dialogues. The mid-term evaluation of the ILUEP programme and the final evaluation of the Amrao Manush project in December 2019 found that ‘There is also the likelihood of Change Makers continuing supporting victims of gender-based violence in their neighbourhood. They have developed the skills and a reputation as counsellors.’

Change Makers have led the organisation of different day observations for sensitising the community members and invite local stakeholders. 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (25th November – 10th December), International Women’s day (8th March), and International Day of the Girl Child (11th October) are observed through events to raise awareness for people on the existing situation and make them more responsible. Change Makers and programme staff work together during national campaigns to influence decision makers, government institutions and other influential bodies to provide better services for girls and women and to support the economic empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

Change Makers have become the advocates within their community and are accepted by them. The ILUEP mid-term evaluation and Amrao Manush final evaluation found that ‘The men and women interviewed from the Lalbagh Change Maker Group recalled various situations where they closely linked with the Ward Councillor to resolve gender based violence incidents in their neighbourhood and how they themselves live now in more harmony since they attended the engaging men and boys training. They also gave evidence of how they have reorganised their group based on their community’s needs. Instead of each of them covering a specific number of households, they now go in groups to a house to increase their chances of solving the issue. They also gave examples of linking to external service providers such as the police.’

Programme staff also spoke of examples where Change Makers were able to use their relationship and familiarity with the Ward Council that was built through the observation days campaigns to negotiate for WASH facilities in their communities and the cleaning of community streets.

‘My wife is a Change-Maker. The lane we live in is named after her - Maya Lane. She runs a shop of betel leaf and cigarettes. I am a carpenter. My wife got a three-day training. She discusses with me about what she has learned there. I go to self-help meetings. I also go to parents meetings. I can’t think out of [I can’t forget] what we have learned from those meetings including being friendly with each other, discuss and take decision about family together, guide the children to grow up together.’ Mr Kalam, Dhaka (husband of a Change Maker).

COVID-19 Heroes

Change Makers have become true agents of change in their own communities during COVID-19. A nationwide lockdown was in place from March to late July, which meant that Concern and ILUEP partners had no face-to-face contact with the communities during this time. Because phone communication was the only way to keep in touch, the Change Makers played a vital role in providing information to community members on how to prevent COVID-19 and what to do if people had symptoms. They have also become a key source of information and advice on livelihood and economic supports, relief, health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and referral on GBV during COVID-19 situation.

Change Makers were also able to influence the Ward Councillors and worked with communities to generate lists of families who were the most vulnerable and required urgent support the most. They carried out this advocacy work on a voluntary basis



Handwashing one: Shahnaz (centre) a Change Maker trained by Concern and partner organisation Nari Maitree, guides Morsheda (left) and Khadiza (right) in hand washing to keep safe from Covid-19, Hazaribag slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh, April 2020. Photo: Fahmida Akter Bina / Nari Maitree.

and by their own initiative, showing positive signs of sustainability. The relationship with the Ward Council has been nurtured through regular stakeholder meetings with Ward Councillors, Change Makers and other programme participants. I am confident that now that the relationships have been built, they can continue without us. They can go and claim their rights. It will last, it will sustain.

Young girls were at increased risk of early marriage due to the effects of the pandemic⁴, but partners have reported that Change Makers have been able to prevent early marriages in some cases.

Change starts from within

It should be noted that Concern and partner staff implementing this programme underwent the Sonke training themselves first as participants, before rolling out the training to Change Makers or other programme participants. I saw that our staff also changed themselves. Through the process and training, it changed them in their own lives. I know that they are doing this from their heart. Programme participants in Chattogram told me that they had never before discussed their personal feelings in this way with others, and for them the process was truly transformational. They reported that now they have this method of self-analysis that when they have a problem they can analyse it through this process and think about the problem in this way. These programme participants felt empowered to seek solutions to any future problems because of this new framework for thinking about problems.

I was asked whether I anticipate any problems with sustainability of the impacts already made through the programme, but I believe that the Change Makers have become role models for other community members, who are already emulating the Change Makers. The responsibility, recognition and respect conferred on community members who are acting as role models is a major factor in what motivates these people to continue these activities. The people are making their changes and the changes are visible. This is how health, WASH, nutrition and livelihood changes have happened, and people are linking these changes with their changed attitudes related to gender. We don't provide them money, to keep it sustainable. I really feel that if people can find their self-esteem and respect (from power structures) without money from us, then they will sustain this without us in the future.

⁴. For example, reduced family income, closing of educational institutions, social insecurity of sexual harassment and increased incidents of rape.

Community Engagement in Central African Republic

Written by Alex Tsakiridis with input from David Jones, Marie Gille and Finola Mohan

The Irish Aid funded Building Community Resilience to Shocks and Stresses in the Central African Republic (CAR) programme began in 2017, with its Conflict, Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction activities launched in 2018. This multisectoral programme's aim is to decrease vulnerabilities to shocks and stresses in West CAR by tackling issues around assets, inequality, risks and vulnerabilities as per the How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty (HCUEP) model.

Community Engagement in CAR can present numerous challenges, if done without sufficient participation right from the off. The lessons learned serve our work on practical and principled levels, ensuring that communities' continued participation enhances our accountability and the quality of our programmes.

The CAR country programme conducts a community engagement process that begins with a knowledge, attitudes and practice



Figure 1: A committee member presenting the disaster risk calendar, DRR training session in Boudouli, January 2020. Photo: Marie Gille.

(KAP) survey of community members. This survey is undertaken in order to identify underlying trends of behaviour in each locality, which allows us to better adapt our approach to each context and understand how specific issues in a community can be understood and dealt with. Other evaluations such as a baseline can be carried out in parallel to reduce survey fatigue. Between one and three weeks after the KAP survey, a community meeting is organised with local leaders, including women, to present the programme and receive feedback. This helps to get the programme started by encouraging leader - and thus community – support. This serves to avoid future complications around community understanding and mobilisation in relation to the programme. As in many contexts, we have found that local leaders always appreciate being consulted and informed on activities happening in their communities, and it is good practice to always greet them as a courtesy.

At the end of the inception meeting, those present are invited to mobilise the community to create a Social Cohesion Community Committee. To capitalise on the motivation created during the inception meeting, participatory and transparent elections of the committees are held within 2-3 days of the inception meeting. This demonstration of progress helps to maintain momentum and engagement with the programme, which can otherwise be challenging. The local community is invited to take part in the election of committee members in an open and public manner – any member of the community can attend and present their candidature. Once the membership of the committee is confirmed, an official document is prepared which is signed by the community leader(s) and then shared with the community and sub-prefecture authorities. This level of transparency and participation is critical for reasons of both principle and practicality.

The formality of the process provides a respectful bedrock on which the committees have far greater chances of success.

The first training, on good governance and rumour management, is then prepared and delivered in a few weeks' time and then approximately each month thereafter a new training is conducted until each of the four modules are completed. These four modules are 1) Good governance and rumour management, 2) Planning for Disaster Risk Reduction, 3) Mobilising for gender equality and sensitization on gender-based violence and 4) Community Conversations. It has been encouraging to see that Committees have taken initiative in organising social cohesion activities from the beginning of their formation. Committee members have expected Concern to cover the organisational and logistical associated costs of the committees. Following extensive discussions, Committees were convinced to pay for a part of the expenses related to these activities, such as for the sound system, chairs, preparing the football field, while Concern arranged trophies, balls, and soft drinks. In this way, the Committees and Concern were able to collaborate as equitable partners, whilst reinforcing that local structures have the ability drive activities in an autonomous way.

Adapting to fragility

The content of the four training sessions was developed specifically for the programme, with guidance from Concern advisors at HQ and the experience of the programme team in country. Built on our experience in the field and remote support from advisors, our training sessions have become more inclusive and participatory. Instead of asking participants to write down what the facilitators were saying or using flipcharts, games and discussions were employed to ensure that all participants, illiterate or otherwise, can participate and, critically, be heard.

In addition to ensuring that each eight-member committee is comprised of four women and four men, the role of women was ensured throughout. Wherever possible the team ensured that women would be key elements of the training, be that as teachers, heads of health centres, partners or community leaders. This gave the opportunity to discuss gender equality in each session and to include a gendered perspective in all approaches.

Ultimately, the team shifted towards co-facilitation. The programme team shifted towards a geographical approach which considered three zones comprising of six to seven communities in each. Having dedicated staff per zone helped to build trusting relationships with the communities. The Project Officers were all well versed on each of the three programme areas (conflict, gender and DRR) and were able to train communities on each of these areas. Field Assistants based in the communities were also hired and were managed by the Project Officer in each zone. This allowed a close follow-up of communities, and strengthened the reporting and monitoring of committees activities and challenges they face. With this new approach, each committee is visited once every two weeks instead of once a month as it was at the beginning of the programme.

The committees were further ‘legitimised’ through strengthening the relationships between them and local authorities and sub-prefectoral authorities. This was achieved by training and sensitisation of the local authorities on topics such as gender-based violence, service mapping and the committee’s roles and responsibilities.

Adapting the Community Conversations methodology to the CAR context

The approaches above were built on the experience of our team in CAR, and of other teams throughout Concern. The Community Conversations (CC) methodology was adapted to the CAR context, initially through the review and translation of existing Concern manuals from Sierra Leone and Kenya. Exchanging with relevant staff from these countries helped us gain a deeper understanding on issues related to implementation. The priority was to be able to maintain the core objectives and principles of the approach while making sure that this is feasible according to the specific cultures and contexts that we have within the programme and in CAR.

The adaptation of the approach involved three key stages. The most significant change was to reduce the length and implementation of the CC cycle from 18-24 months to 10-12 months. This was a far more practical timeline that also allowed the programme team to have sustained and intense engagement with communities in comparison to a longer timeline. CAR is recovering from recent conflict in the area, has a high level of dependency on humanitarian assistance, and limited experience of the CC and similar approaches. In light of this context, it was decided to prioritise depth and intensity in order to support higher quality programme delivery and stronger programme outcomes.

Specific focal topics, guided stories and exercises were used to provide structure to the sessions and to minimise the risk the CC process might be used as a forum for negative and counter-productive discussion. The subject matter was also adapted: following consultations with programme staff in other countries and advisors with expertise in gender and equality, a selection



Figure 2: The customary ‘family portrait’ during a Gender session training in Bekadili, October 2020. Committee members are invited to attend the meeting with their partners. Photo: Marie Gille.

of exercises and tools were chosen from the existing CC approach that best fit the aims of the CAR programme (including reducing vulnerability to conflict and gender-based violence). This included a range of activities that highlighted women’s roles in the community and adapted the language, examples and critical questions for discussion to better reflect the peacebuilding aims of the programme. Finally, the manual was translated into French and subsequently into Sango to make it more accessible for community facilitators. The examples and stories that are included in the manual, as well as images and tools, were also adapted to better reflect the local context.

Challenges

Despite agreement with the community leadership at the Strategic Planning Workshop at the outset of the programme to not provide incentives to direct beneficiaries

or committee members, four months after the creation of the committees, members became quite vocal about their need to receive compensation. The original decision was rooted in considerations of sustainability – to prevent a reduction in activities once the funding and Concern-driven activities ceased. Upon further investigation, it became clear that communities had become used to receiving financial compensation during emergency phases of programming in the area and they had come to consider it an obligation of an agency doing work in their area. Given their experience with NGOs, communities had become increasingly conscious of their bargaining power. A decision needed to be made to find a balance between the long term sustainability and the short-term viability of the programme. A compromise was made by the programme team to provide a “transport reimbursement fee” on a monthly basis to each committee member, as well as a fixed amount to cover dinner

expenses for every training participant. Considering that the trainings lasted from 8am to 5pm, the dinner per diem allowed participants to fully take part in the trainings without having to worry about food for them or their family for that day.

This experience reinforced the importance of contextualised good practice fuelled by ongoing and meaningful dialogue. Even though the initial decision was made to underpin future sustainability, it failed to recognise the importance of certain contextual and cultural expectations. Even though “transport fees” and “dinner per diem” were justified as such, they were a way to recognise and motivate the continued involvement of Committee members. Regardless of how influential the actions of humanitarian and development actors has been, culturally speaking in CAR, financial recognition for time is considered extremely important. As the (Northern) adage goes, “time is money”. There is no reason to expect any less, especially when resources are so limited, a learning clearly reinforced in the specific context of this programme.

Despite the fact that Committees are created by community open assemblies, it has been challenging to make communities understand that these Committees are not Concern's. Indeed, Concern train and materially support Committee members, cover their transport costs and coach them but this is done in the context of a partnership between a community structure and a humanitarian/development actor. The Social Cohesion Community Committee remains the Committee of the community in which it works for its development. In this sense, we have not only stressed that in every occasion, but also decided to provide Committee members with visibility showing their true identity. Instead of shirts and caps being green or having a central Concern logo, we decided to make them blue with yellow inscriptions; blue representing peace and yellow hope. It is hoped that

this small gesture reinforces the autonomy and ownership of the Committees. The programme also faces a challenge in the renewal of the Committees as their mandate is only for two years. Transparent elections of new members and handover of responsibilities, tools, knowledge and materials will be challenges that need to be addressed. Although the Committees are responsible for these processes, they will be supported by Concern to ensure they are empowered to exercise this role, stay motivated and committed, and carry this out efficiently and sustainably.

Lessons in learning and adaptation

The need for contextualisation itself was a result of having the luxury of institutional knowledge. Predefined and tested materials, colleagues and advisors, all provided the experiential and technical expertise from which the programme was built. Contextual and cultural adaption was then necessary, in the design of activities and in the continued dialogue with communities. Despite challenges and the need for adaption within the programme, the Committees continue to participate and thrive. Even if raised as a complaint, the concerns of the Committees were responded to with dialogue and compromise – two critical elements of the Committees' responsibilities within their communities. Within a context so fraught with conflict as well as chronic issues, creating the space for Communities to engage and resolve issues independently also reinforces a strong message about our role as humanitarian actors - that we aim not to control or to manage, but to facilitate. To relieve the pressures brought about by infinite immediate and historical factors. The way to navigate this complexity? Listening, learning, and adapting.

Engaging communities through Community Education Committees in Somalia

Written by Anne Wekesa Ejakait and Mohamed Ali Ibrahim with input from Finola Mohan

Background

In the early 1990s, after the civil war in Somalia, government systems including education systems were disjointed, unstructured or completely broken down. This meant that communities had to largely take responsibility for the education needs of the children themselves, with little engagement with the Ministry of Education. By the mid-1990s, it was apparent that greater community awareness and increased local participation were the only way to revive the education system. In the absence of a fully functional government, several schools were opened that drew their legitimacy from the local communities that started them. During this period, the violence slowed down and some educational projects implemented by local NGOs and international organisations began in some parts of the country. Concern was one of the organisations that supported communities to construct/ rehabilitate and improve the quality of management and learning in schools, especially in lower Shebelle.

Local communities invested in the education sector more than any other stakeholders. In fact, most of the schools that survived during the civil war were organised by local communities. As much as the communities played this critical role in supporting education of their children, they were independent of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (MoECHE),



Figure 1: Wilwal School destroyed during the war.
Photo: Ahmed Ali Dirshe.

with limited engagement with their officials to ensure children's education needs were adequately met.

In addition to the negative impacts from decades of civil war, recurrent emergencies such as severe drought, clan conflicts and floods put extra pressure on the government, communities and partners to provide basic services such as education.



Figure 2: Schoolchildren playing in the grounds of the rebuilt Wilwal School, 2020. Photo: Ahmed Ali Dirshe.

Despite these impediments, Somalia has made significant achievements in its recovery from the civil war and management of emergencies. It is now moving on the path of peace and development. The gradual restoration of order, stability, and national institutions ensued, and the Government has been moving towards asserting genuine ownership and leadership of development activities.

In order to build on the success of community engagement in maintaining and restoring education during crises, the Federal Ministry of Education¹ has a vision of improving the education system, in particular the role of the community and the legitimacy of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in running schools. The Community Education Committees (CEC) contribute to pursuing policies which will turn this vision into reality.

Irish Aid has been a long-standing funding and strategic support to Concern's Somalia Education programme, enabling Concern to gather an evidence base that has been used to influence the MoECHE. This has resulted in Concern being in a position to inform and influence Government priorities within the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) and Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG), including highlighting and advocating for the continued strong role of the CECs. This in turn has led to Concern being selected as a Global Partnership for Education (GPE) implementing partner. Through this, Concern has been entrusted to lead on the CEC training manual development, policy development, School Improvement Plan (SIP) training and rollout, alongside other activities.

In the current situation with a relatively stable government in (2020), the MoECHE has shown commitment to increase community participation in school-based management through providing guidance for operations of CECs to foster greater levels of community ownership, and to increase the level of engagement that enhances

¹ Federal Ministry of Education is the Mother/Central Office of the Ministry of Education for the whole country While MoECHE includes the Federal Ministry of Education and State Level Ministries of Education.



Figure 3: CEC Training at Bananay school Lower Shebele 2002. Photo: Ahmed Ali Dirshe

accountability in the sector. In this model of School Based Management, members of the community are mobilised and sensitised on the need to have a structured school management system.

Under the GPE, Concern worked with MoE CHE and other education actors including CECs to develop a standardised package for CEC establishment and training and a CEC policy framework for all schools in Somalia. These two government documents have been approved by MoE CHE and will be used by them and other education actors. The harmonized training package was used to establish CECs and to roll out training by Concern in partnership with MoE CHE at federal and state levels. It is important to note that the mode of training took into account the limited literacy levels of CEC members. Facilitators strategized to work with communities from known to unknown through guided/ facilitated conversations, with limited writing and reading. Small groups were then formed to converse further and issues and solutions proposed documented by the head teachers or literate members, based on their different

abilities and contexts. These modules form a foundation through which MoE CHE will continue capacity building of communities in school management.

The CEC policy framework institutionalises CEC within MoE CHE and defines ways of engagement between MoE CHE (duty bearers) and communities (right holders). The policy aligns with and complies with the federal and state laws of Somalia. Moreover, the policy framework is also meant to help MoE CHE to meet its strategic objectives² and to ensure legal and regulatory compliance. All stakeholders are expected to be aware of and ensure their practices and interventions comply with this policy framework.

Adhering to CEC policy guidelines, all-inclusive meetings are organised with MoE CHE or other agency staff, where roles, responsibilities and characteristics of a

². In line with ESSP, the objectives for Primary Education, 2018-2020 are, Priority Objective 3.1: Expand equitable access to free primary education, Priority Objective 3.2: Increase the quality of learning outcomes in primary education.

CEC member are shared. These meetings include all relevant stakeholders in the community, parents, community leaders, religious leaders, businesspeople, and any other community members who have an interest in the school. It is made clear that the role is voluntary and there is no payment in any form for the two-year committee membership. The CEC policy outlines the structure and establishment of the CECs with six members democratically elected taking into account the various interest groups in the community (religious leaders, women leaders, parents, community members, and representatives of people living with disabilities (PLWD) and parents of children with special needs in the school). The seventh position is automatically taken by the Head Teacher of the school, who serves as the Secretary of the Committee.

We anticipate that Concern's contribution in the development of the harmonised CEC training module, rolling out CEC training in 651 schools³, for the implementation of Education Sector Program Implementation Grant, and CEC Policy framework development will provide an opportunity for greater and stronger engagement between communities and MoECEHE for improved access and quality learning for all Somali children.

Improved Engagement

The first evidence of improved engagement is MoECEHE taking the initiative to disburse funds for first time via School Inclusion Grants into the school accounts, at the

³. The 651 schools was mapped from the Southern State of Somalia, i.e. the Federal MoECEHE and its Federal Member States (FMS) MoECEHE. The GPE ESPIG grant covers four Federal states which includes Jubbaland, Galmudug, Hirsh belle, South-West State and Benadir Region (Mogadishu). The actual number of schools is not yet known as the MoECEHE EMIS data systems is recently established and all schools were given the access to insert their school data. It is believed that the total number of schools is in the thousands.

rate of \$5000 per school. This followed an extensive training of CECs on preparation of SIPs, basic financial management and record keeping. These funds will be disbursed two times, the first disbursement was made in early November 2020 and the second disbursement will be done in the second quarter of 2021. The importance of the SIP is that communities have the freedom to discuss at their level and decide how they want to utilise the funds to improve the learning of their children. It is also important to note that the SIP is a framework and a basic foundation for sustainable development as they mobilise their own resources and a framework through which MoECEHE, other donors and education actors will engage with communities based on their own needs and priorities. Communities will be supported by the State and district based MoECEHE officials to continuously update their SIPs to reflect changing context and needs.

In addition to supporting improved school management, the strengthened CECs play a significant role in improving the quality of learning for boys and girls. Through Irish Aid funding, Concern Worldwide has been conducting an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in five Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) schools in Mogadishu, 2013-2015. From the beginning, we used these assessment results to identify gaps in children's reading skills and use these to design training content for teachers every year. The schools targeted have demonstrated significant improvement in reading (boys and girls). Students in grade 2 had a mean score of 42 correct words per minute (cwpm) by 2015, more than double the score of 16 cwpm attained in 2013. Scores improved significantly between grades as students progressed. By 2015, scores for grade 4 students reached a mean of 64 cwpm, from 51 cwpm in 2013. By 2015, there was no difference in scores between grade 3 boys and girls at 54 cwpm, compared to 2013 where girls scored 26

cwpm and boys 31 cwpm. This success is largely attributed to CECs who conduct campaigns among community members to allow adequate time for girls to study at home and consistently monitor teacher and student attendance. It is expected that these results will be mirrored and magnified as CECs become more effective in a larger number of schools across Somalia.

The formalisation of communities' integral role in the management of schools and learning of children and linking this with the support of the MoECHE, is strengthening and future proofing the education system in Somalia. The increased capacity of communities to support their children's education will place them in a stronger position to withstand potential future disruptions as were seen in the past, increasing opportunities for children to enjoy safe access to quality education that supports their wellbeing.



Figure 4: CEC members lead a community meeting at Jabuti school closure ceremony, 2012.
Photo: Ahmed Ali Dirshe.

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For whom is the publication?

All staff involved in designing, implementing, managing, monitoring, evaluating and communicating Concern's work. This publication should also be shared with partners.

What this publication includes:

- Promising practice
- Organisational learning
- Promotion of multi-sectoral and integrated approaches to programming
- Links to full reports

What it doesn't include:

- Targeted recommendations
- Additional evidence not included in the papers cited
- Detailed descriptions of interventions or their implementation

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