BACK2SCHOOL PROJECT IN ETHIOPA

Evidence-based Adaptations and Scale-up of
Accelerated Education Programmes

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS
2023

African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian government with the support of civil society organisations have been implementing various accelerated education programmes to provide second chance for education of children who missed their first chance of getting into primary schools or dropped out for various reasons. Reports indicate that over 280,000 out-of-school children have so far been reintegrated back to the conventional school system with the help of different accelerated learning programmes. While existing programmes have contributed immensely to get out of school children back to school, there have been limitations in the design as well as implementation of these programmes that had impact in reach to a wider age group of learners as well as availability of options depending on interest. The Back2school project in Ethiopia, implemented by ACPF, sought to contribute to efforts that seek to address this challenge.

This impact report presents the key outputs, outcomes, and lessons from the implementation of the Back2school project during the period of January 2022 - November 2023.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The Back2School Ethiopia Project is aimed at generating evidence in support of scaling-up enhanced accelerated learning model in Ethiopia to facilitate effective re-integration of out-of-school girls into the mainstream education system. Specifically, the project seeks to:

1. critically review the effectiveness of accelerated learning programmes in Ethiopia,

2. refine accelerated learning models based on evidence and lessons from similar accelerated learning models,

3. adapt and test the improved model in selected schools and classrooms, and

4. promote adoption and scale-up of the improved model.

ACPF has been implementing the project in collaboration with its implementing partner- The Luminos Fund and other local implementing partners on the ground.

3. OVERVIEW OF BACK2SCHOOL PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The back2school project was launched on 31 March in Addis Ababa in the presence of key stakeholders in Ethiopia such as the Ministry of Education, the regional bureaus of education, national CSOs, and like-minded international organisations. At the launch, the project was introduced, and collaboration was sought from all stakeholders, particularly government and non-governmental actors operating within the education sector.

ACPF then undertook two studies in Ethiopia focusing on accelerated education programming in Ethiopia. One of the studies assessed existing accelerated learning models in Ethiopia and documented their strengths, gaps, good practices, and lessons. The second study examined the capacity of the government in terms of its capacity to lead, implement, guide and scale-up accelerated education programmes in different regions across Ethiopia. Among other things, the studies primarily helped identify key elements that had to be improved on the existing accelerated learning models and showed capacity gaps with the government in implementing the programme.

Several consultations were held with key stakeholders- government and civil society actors- to develop the refined model which could potentially be adopted and scaled-up. Lessons were also drawn from other countries- particularly from Tanzania and Kenya where the back2school project was implemented- on good practices, strategies, and approaches of catering for out of school children. Those lessons were adopted to refine the existing models in Ethiopia. Once the refined model was developed, it was presented back to stakeholders for comments and further enrichment.

The next step was pilot testing the refined model in actual classrooms. ACPF, in collaboration with Luminos Fund and its local implementing partners, pilot tested the refined model in 10 pilot classes in four regions of Ethiopia reaching more than 300 children. The pilot run for 10 months. Lessons from the pilot were documented and discussed further at a regional workshop which involved stakeholders from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kenya organized in October 2023. Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) programme implementers at regional, woreda and schools' levels were sensitized on the refined model to trigger adoption and eventual scale-up of the programme.

4. EVIDENCE-BASED ENHANCEMENT FOR BETTER REINTEGRATION OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

There are different accelerated education programmes which are catering for out of school children in Ethiopia. These programmes are being run both by the government as well as civil society organisations. Despite having some differences, the models largely constitute a 10-month pedagogic intervention that allows out-of-school children between 8 and 14 years old to catch up on three years of primary education and be integrated into mainstream schools. The government's adopted model is known as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), and it has been implemented in government schools with government teachers. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education identified Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) as a response to the commitment outlined in the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP VI) (2020/21-2025/26) to provide alternative primary school modalities for out-of-school children within the government primary school system. ACPF's back2school project built upon these ongoing initiatives and introduced evidence-based interventions in support of bringing back, retaining, and transitioning out-of-school children.

The evidence was generated through two national studies in Ethiopia. The research processes were participatory, designed using participatory methodologies, collecting data from the key stakeholders themselves through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Observations of accelerated learning classrooms and teaching practices of facilitators through physical school visits were also used to triangulate the research findings and get a more comprehensive picture. These were all complemented by an extensive desk review of all relevant and available programme and policy documents in Ethiopia and similar other programmes from Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania. This was critical in assessing how far the policy environment is enabling the design and implementation of accelerated education programmes, and what that means for the adaptation and scale up of accelerated learning programmes in Ethiopia in the future.

The evidence in the end was clear. There is a need for a more favourable policy environment for the design, adaptation, and/or enhancement and implementation of accelerated education programming in the country to reach scale. The studies also showed capacity gaps at national and regional levels stemming from the absence of a clear implementation strategy and a shortage of resources, including an inadequate number of trained teachers, school principals, cluster supervisors, and experts. Key findings from the studies include:

a) Reviewed accelerated education programmes are contributing towards creating equitable access to education for many vulnerable children but have limited scope given the magnitude of over-age out-of-school children in the country.

b) Graduates of accelerated education programmes were outperforming their peers once mainstreamed into formal schools, implying improved learning outcomes. The use of local content, songs, drama, and games seem to add to the relevance and quality of instruction.

c) The way facilitators and teachers are trained (practice-based), the follow-on support provided, small class size, and (performance-based) accountability mechanisms put in place, are, among others, helping them to improve their teaching practices.

d) More work needs to be done to make learning environments (same as link primary schools) as safe as possible. There are incidences of bullying, harassment, physical punishment, and limited accessibility and functionality of available WASH facilities.

e) Reviewed programmes do not seem to sufficiently and meaningfully involve and mobilise local communities (other than the self-help group members) in the management and operations of their classes/Centres to support effective implementation.

f) There is a need for a more favourable policy environment for the design, adaptation, and/ or enhancement and implementation of accelerated education programming in the country to reach scale. The Ghanaian experience indicates the importance of developing a comprehensive approach that includes a clear policy framework together with matching practical guidelines and handbooks at all levels of the programme.

g) There is a lack of structural clarity within the MOE, where there seems to be overlap between the Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) and Education Programs and Quality Improvement divisions. This overlap has been replicated in some regions.

h) A lack of capacity to effectively implement and expand ALP was observed at all levels, stemming from a lack of resources, as well as an inadequate number of trained teachers, school principals, cluster supervisors, and experts. Additional challenges that were reported include:

- A shortage or absence of ALP learning materials, including condensed textbooks, teacher's guides, and appropriate supplementary reading materials for children.

- Weak monitoring and evaluation systems and practices due to the lack of appropriate classroom observation tools and data collection formats that are fit for the purpose.

- Lack of motivation by teachers to engage in ALP classes allegedly owing to the demanding and burdensome work of ALP classes.

- Low partnership and networking practices among state and non state actors at all levels of the education management system.

Most importantly, the studies made it clear that there was demand among education stakeholders for an accelerated learning model that caters to older out-of-school children, provides an alternative path for children who are unlikely to continue with mainstream education, and has a more age specific condensed curriculum.

These key findings informed the development of strategies and approaches that improve the existing model and respond to specific concerns and gaps identified by the government about inefficacies of the current model.

5. THE IMPROVED ACCELERATED EDUCATION MODEL

The improved accelerated education model was developed to achieve three key objectives:

1. to ensure children are able to learn with their age mates.

2. to accommodate wider age group of out-of-school children.

3. to provide additional alternative pathways for children who may not want or cannot return to mainstream schools for various reasons.

With the aim of achieving these three objectives, the back2school project proposed three major enhancements that expanded the age group and proposed additional pathways to cater for older age out of school children:

1. Implementation of an age-specific curriculum, which requires students to be disaggregated into groups of 9-11 years and 12-14 years.

2. Inclusion of older children (15-17 age group) which were not included in the existing programme.

3. Introduction of alternative (vocational) pathways for out-of-school children who do not want or cannot continue in the academic pathway. This includes age group of 12-14 as well as 15-17.

The three enhancements were then translated into levels as depicted in the diagram below with clear target groups and proposed academic and vocational pathways based on age.

Proposed Refined Model
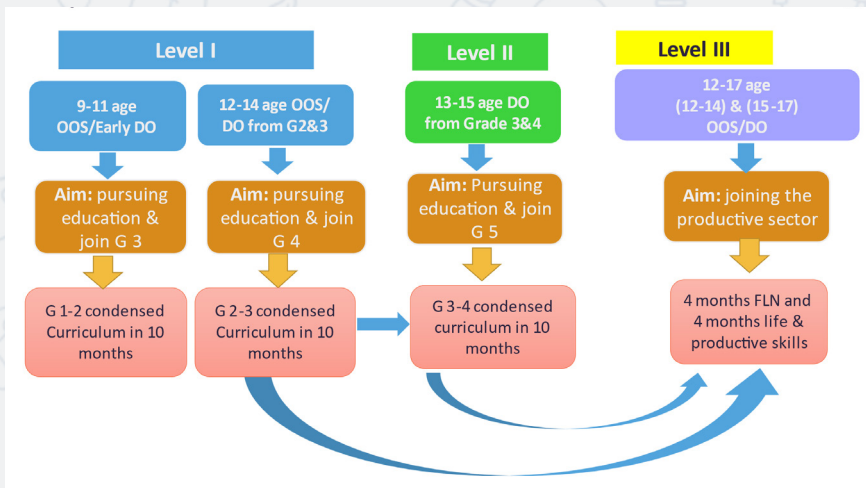
6. PILOT TESTING OF THE REFINED MODEL

The pilot testing phase involves implementing refined elements or components of an accelerated education programme in actual classrooms. So, the key question at this phase was to identify key elements of the refined model that can be pilot tested within the time and resources available. Following in-house discussions and discussions with relevant stakeholders, it became clear that one of the elements-level II (that seeks to cater for age group of 13-15 in the academic pathway)- could not be pilot tested as it would require a newly condensed curriculum which would be beyond the scope of the project. This was for two reasons: a) condensing a curriculum is the mandate of the Ministry of Education. b) it would require longer time which would go beyond the project period. As a result, the pilot testing focused on the remaining two components (Level I and Level III).

6.1. Pilot Theory of Change

The table below shows how the pilot testing attempted to address the specific challenges of the existing accelerated education programme to achieve its desired outcomes.

Present scenario/THE PROBLEM	Activity/ Intervention	Desired outcome
When children cannot join school due to various problems on the right age, they will be embarrassed to join lower grades for their age and sit with younger children, hence, forced to remain out of school or drop out early.	Organizing accelerated learning classes by age would enable older OOSC/ dropout children to learn faster with their agemates with the aim of joining their age mates after a year.	Many out of school and dropout children will be motivated to rejoin school and continue their education because they are able to catch up with their peers.
Adolescents and older children dropout from schools because of different problems and may not want/cannot join the conventional schools for various reasons. They have no other pathways or lack the necessary skills which would allow them to support themselves and their families.	Providing basic literacy and numeracy skills along with vocational skills training through vocational training facilities and leading them through appropriate pathways is required.	This would enable these students to complete the course and become productive citizens by securing employment or self-employment opportunities.

6.2. Levels and age categories of children enrolled in the pilot testing

Guided by the theory of change, in the 2022-23 academic school year, a total of 10 classes were launched to pilot the core elements of a refined accelerated learning model. Accordingly, a total of 308 learners were enrolled for the pilot testing.

On the academic pathway side (level I), the pilot introduced two variations of accelerated academic path: one for children aged 9-11 that covers a condensed Grade 1-2 curriculum, and one for children aged 12-14 that covers a condensed Grade 2-3 curriculum. With regards to the productive

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pathway (level III), the pilot introduced two productive pathways based on age groupings of children (aged 13-14 and 15-17 years old). Here below is the rationale for the selection of each of these levels and age categories of children:

Levels	Children selected for the pilot	Rationale for selection
I	Children between the ages of 9-11 years old who were either non-entrants or dropouts	These children couldn't join conventional school due to various problems and as a result their education is delayed but want to re-join the conventional school.
II	Children between the ages of 12-14 years old who were dropouts from grades 2 and 3.	These children dropped out of school due to many problems and would like to get a second chance opportunity to catch their age mates in the formal school.
III	Children between the age of 13-14 who either dropped out or never been to school. These children could not pursue their formal education.	These children could no longer go back to the conventional school for different reasons. Equipping them with productive skills and life skills training would prepare them to be productive when they reach at the minimum age of employment. The children would still need foundational literacy and numeracy skills.
IV	Children between the ages of 15-17 who either dropped out or never been to school. These children could not pursue their formal education.	These children would like to join the employment sector (either self-employed or employed), hence, equipping them with relevant productive skills, life skills as well as functional literacy and numeracy would be useful.

6.3. Pilot implementation approaches and sites

For children under level I, additional classes and teachers were arranged since aged 9-11 and 12-14 groups of children were put in separate classrooms with their closest age mates. However, both were provided with the existing condensed curriculum and no new curriculum had to

be developed. For children who joined level III, they were provided with 4 months of foundational literacy and numeracy skills trainings (based on existing condensed curriculum), life skills training, and 4 months of area specific, relevant, and appropriate employable vocational skills training in collaboration with technical and vocational training institutes and other training facilities.

The pilot was implemented in four locations, namely: Wolaitta (SNNPRS), Yirgalem (Sidama), Akaki-Kality (Addis Ababa) and Dire Dawa. These sites were selected based on accessibility and diversification of contextual realities (such as urban/rural, pastoral/non-pastoral contexts).

Levels	Age Group	Profile of Children	Curriculum/ Programme	Aim/Goal	# of	Implementation Site (Schools)
I	9-11	Out-of-school or early dropout children from G 1	G 1&2 curriculum condensed (4 hours a day)	To join grade 3 in schools	3	Addis Ababa (1) Dire Dawa (1) Sidama (1)
II	12-14	Dropout children from G 2 or 3	G 2&3 curriculum condensed (7 hours a day)	To join grade 4 in schools	3	Addis Ababa (1) Dire Dawa (1) Sidama (1)
III	13-14	Out-of-school or dropout children from any level	4 months functional literacy plus 4 months productive/ life skills	To join the	2	Sidama (1) Wolaitta (1)

IV	15-17	Out-of-school or dropout children from any level	4 months functional literacy plus 4 months productive/ life skills	To join the	2	Sidama (1) Wolaitta(1)

6.4. Results and Lessons Captured from the Pilot Implementation

At the start of the pilot in October/November 2022, a total of 340 learners (151Male, 189Female) were identified and got registered to start the pilot programme. Out of these, 308 learners (133M, 175Female) were able to start their classes (in 10 classes) while the remaining 32 learners did not show up in schools for various personal and family related reasons. Students in the Productive Path classes were provided with a four-month literacy and numeracy course and then received four consecutive months of short-term training in a vocation of their choice at the Polytechnic Colleges in Hawassa and St/Marry Polytechnical College in Sodo town. The tables below provide the summary of students who were registered, started classes, dropped out, and completed their education in their respective streams.

In July 2023, all pilot classes were concluded successfully and a total of 260 learners (107Male, 153Female) completed their classes successfully. The remaining 48 learners (26Male, 22Female) dropped-out for different personal and family related reasons. Students in the academic pathway were assigned in age-appropriate, accelerated education programme classes. Please see the table below for the details.

Table 1: No of Students who were registered in the various pilot classes.

Location/ Region	# of classes	Academic Pathway								Productive Pathway							
		Age 9-11		T	Age 12-14		T	Academic		Age 12-14		T	Age 15-17		T	Productive	
		M	F		M	F		M	F	M	F		M	F		M	F
Dire Dawa	2	30	29	59	6	15	21	36	44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sidama	4	15	17	32	15	17	32	30	34	16	14	30	11	26	37	27	40
SNNPR	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	14	26	15	19	34	27	33
Addis Ababa	2	21	18	39	10	20	30	31	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	66	64	130	31	52	83	97	116	28	28	56	26	45	71	54	73

Table 2: No of Students who started academic path classes in all the sites.

	Academic Pathway																	
	Age 9 - 11									Age 12-14								
Location/ Region	Registered			Dropped out			Completed			Registered			Dropped out			Completed		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Addis Ababa	15	15	30	1	0	1	14	15	29	10	20	30	3	2	5	7	18	25
Sidama	15	17	32	0	4	4	15	13	28	15	17	32	7	3	10	8	14	22
Dire Dawa	8	12	20	0	0	0	8	12	20	15	17	32	1	1	2	14	16	30
Wolaitta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	38	44	82	1	4	5	37	40	77	40	54	94	11	6	17	29	48	77

Table 3a: No of Students (aged 12-14) who started productive path classes in all the sites.

Region	Age 12 to 14																	
	Registered			Dropped out			Completed											
							Tyre repair			Animal Husbandry and poultry			Wood work /Furniture			Food & Catering		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Sidama	16	17	33	3	2	5	5	0	5	3	15	18	5	0	5	0	0	0
Wolaitta	8	20	28	4	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	19	23
Total	24	37	61	7	3	10	5	0	5	3	15	18	5	0	5	4	19	23

Table 3b: No of Students (aged 15-17) who started productive path classes in all the sites.

Region	Productive Pathway																
	Age 15 to 17																
	Registered			Dropped out			Completed										
							Animal Husbandry			Poultry			Food & Catering			Fashion & design		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
	12	27	**39**	3	8	**11**	2	8	**10**	3	5	**8**	3	6	**9**	0	0	0
Sidama	19	13	**32**	4	1	**5**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	12	**28**
Wolaitta	**31**	**40**	**71**	**7**	**9**	**16**	**2**	**8**	**10**	**3**	**5**	**8**	**3**	**6**	**9**	**16**	**12**	**28**

Table 4: Completion rates of both pathways in all pilot sites.

Sites	Academic Path (children 9-11)	Academic Path (children 12-14)	Productive Path (children 12-14)	Productive Path (children 15-17)
Sidama Region	88% completion and transition to the next grade (57% were girls. Average reading scores: 38 words per minute	69% completion and transition to next grade (55% were girls). Average reading scores: 42 words per minute	85% of students completed training in poultry, animal husbandry, woodwork, tire repair (54% girls)	68% animal husbandry, poultry, or fast-food preparation (70% girls)
Dire Dawa	100% completion and transition (95% scored above 60%)	93% completion	-	-
Addis Ababa		83% completion (75% of the successful students were girls)	-	-
Wolaitta	-	▪	89% of students in the food preparation stream completed the program	88% of students in the garment making and 89% of students in the food preparation stream completed

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7. RESEARCH UPTAKE: EFFORTS AND OUTCOMES

ACPF held a variety of stakeholder consultations and engagement meetings with representatives from every level of the education system in Ethiopia to share the findings of its studies and ensure the project has stakeholders' support and buy-in.

Our national stakeholder's consultative workshop on Evidence-based Refinement of Accelerated Learning Programs in Ethiopia that was held on 6- 7 October 2022, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia was particularly useful for uptake of research results. A total of 53 participants representing seven regions (Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Sidama, Somali, SNNPR, and Southwest Ethiopia), two City Administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa), and 20 CSO organisations participated in the workshop. At the Federal Level, all key departments i.e., the Adult and Non-Formal Education Department, School Improvement Programme Department, Curriculum Development Department, Strategic Planning Department, Education Management Information System Department, and Teacher Development Department were represented. We believe the wider reach of different stakeholders at a national level would support our efforts for adoption and scale-up.

The four capacity building training programmes that were held simultaneously on August 7, 2023, in Dire Dawa, Wolaitta Sodo, Yirgalem, and Addis Ababa also created a unique opportunity for sharing and promoting the uptake of our research findings. These training programmes were particularly helpful to reach representatives from the Regional Education Bureaus, Zone and Woreda Education Offices, as well as supervisors and school directors in the different regions. Besides, ACPF's advocacy workshops held in DireDawa and Hawassa (on September 5) and Addis Ababa (on September 7) provided another opportunity to disseminate the findings of our research and the lessons documented from the 10-month long pilot exercise to high-level officials at regional, zonal and woreda levels. in Addis Ababa. A total of

92 participants who are representatives from the Regional Education Bureaus, Regional and Zonal Labor and Work Departments, Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), Women and Children Offices, and the Mayor's Offices in each region were reached through these platforms.

These stakeholders expressed their strong commitment to use the results of the research, the refined model, and lessons from the implementation of the pilot to inform their programming in different locations. This was particularly evident at a meeting held in Wolaitta (on July 26) where government stakeholders gathered with Wolaitta Development Association to discuss opportunities to create pathways for employment of young people who received short-term vocational training through the back2school project. Participants included the Head of the Zonal Education Department, Head of the Zonal Women, Children and Youth Department, the Mayor of Sodo City, the Head of Sodo City Job Creation and Enterprises Development Office, and the Head of the Sodo City Women and Youth Affairs Office, as well as the Program Director of St. Mary's Technical and Vocational Training Institute. The consultative meeting was televised through Wolaitta Television- a local media station in the region.

Our National Workshop on Accelerated Education Programming and Schools' Visit programme, held on 20-23 November, was yet another important platform where we shared back the lessons from the implementation of evidence-based refinements and adaptation of the accelerated education programmes in the Ethiopia and promoted a broader scale-up of the proposed changes. The workshop, which was attended by 46 participants from the Ministry of Education and 11 Regional Education Bureaus and 5 local civil society organisations, provided a unique opportunity to share lessons, call on stakeholders explore ways of addressing gaps identified through our research and pilot testing more effectively.

The workshop was followed by a schools' visit programme that was organised for government authorities and senior experts of the Ministry of Education and selected Regional Education Bureaus. A total of 12 senior experts on accelerated learning programme (7 from the Ministry of Education, 3 from regional education bureaus, 3 from ACPF and its implementing partners) participated in the experience sharing visit. The participants visited selected schools in Sidama region where the pilot project has been implemented and exchanged lessons and experiences around the implementation of the refined model in actual classrooms. The visit provided the authorities from the Ministry of Education to provide guidance and direction for the schools and the responsible local education offices to explore ways of sustaining impact and scaling-up initiatives to reach more out-of-school children across the region.

ACPF's evidence and knowledge products (which are also translated into Amharic) will continue to be widely circulated among relevant education stakeholders in Ethiopia to make sure stakeholders in the various regions address the various gaps identified through our studies.

8. THE GENDER DYNAMICS

The enrolment, drop-out and completion figures which are disaggregated by sex, age, stream, and training type are important to appreciate key lessons with regards to gender considerations during the implementation of the pilot exercise.

1. It is evident that majority of learners in both sexes have completed their academic as well as vocational skills training programmes. For example, out of the 176 learners (78Male, 98Female) enrolled in the academic pathway, 154 learners (66Male, 88Female) completed their classes and only 22 learners (10Female, 12 Male) dropped out. On the productive pathway, out of 132 registered learners (55Male, 77Female), 106 learners (41Male, 65Female) have completed their course in different and 26 learners (14Male, 12Female) have dropped out. These learners dropped out for different reasons but mostly it is because of economic reasons.

2. In both the academic and productive streams/pathways, more female leaners were enrolled than male students. The completion rates accordingly were also higher for female learners when compared to male learners.

3. There are no significant differences in drop-out rates between boys and girls; however, given the higher number of enrolment for girls, it is evident that more boys than girls have dropped out.

4. In terms of the type of vocational training the students received, there is mixed picture in terms of both sexes choosing vocational areas that not typically/traditionally assigned for either of the sexes. For example, a significantly higher number of female trainees chose to be enrolled in skill areas such as Animal Husbandry and Poultry and Food Catering. On the other hand, higher number of male trainees (16Male, 12 Female) chose fashion and design.

9. LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMMING IN ETHIOPIA

A. Age-appropriate groupings and classroom instruction: Age-appropriate classes and instruction have shown to work. It was evident that students' engagement in classrooms was highly influenced by age- appropriate groupings in classrooms. Children preferred to play, learn, and interact with their appropriate age. The test results from all 10 classrooms reveal that student scores have improved significantly with lower number students dropping out or scoring below 50%. Beyond the test scores, teachers have also witnessed that the dynamism of the classroom (participation, interest, and attendance rates) has significantly improved as children felt at ease learning with their age mates. Older children (aged 13, 14) who used to feel ashamed because they had to learn with very young children (aged 9, 10) have shown improved

enthusiasm to participate and interact in the pilot classrooms. On the other hand, younger children who felt tense, anxious, and threatened learning with much older children felt relaxed and happier to finally be with their age mates. (see the case of Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa academic path pilot classes).

B. **Age a factor in completion rates:** The results and drop-out rates of the pilot students showed that the older the children, the lower will be their chance to complete their education, and older children are more likely to drop out than the younger ones. This finding, although it requires further research, has an implication for the importance of early education for children. On the other hand, the assumption that age-appropriate groupings would minimize dropout supposed to minimize dropout in addition to its pedagogic benefits. Results are not consistent with this assumption. The other parameter that might have played a role here could be economic status /profile of the children. Given that some of the children targeted were the most marginalized children, they might be forced to quit their education due to many reasons, mainly economic reasons. This requires further investigation.

C. **Improved academic performance and soft skills:** Most of the students enrolled in the pilot classrooms have performed well and transitioned to the next class. Please see table 3. Generally, students in the age range of 12-14 scored better than those aged 9-11. For example, while three classes of students aged 12-14 scored above 80 grade point average, 2 classes in the age range of 9 -11 scored above 80. Beyond academic performance, however, it was observed that leaners in all pilot classrooms have shown improvements in their soft skills such as in their abilities to listen to each other respectfully and expressing ideas clearly and without hesitation.

D. Pilot testing scope and duration: The contribution of the piloting exercise for the broader effort to adopt and scale-up the refined model has been emphasised by different stakeholders during various consultations. However, feedback was also received on how optimal the scope of the pilot had been. It was pointed out by government stakeholders at regional levels that a more expanded pilot that included additional sites in different regions and woredas across the country would have provided a more comprehensive picture of what worked and what did not. It was thus commented that additional pilot testing that continues in the next academic year with additional classes in all regions including the newly established regions of the country could be considered for a more effective advocacy on adaptation and scaling-up.

E. Leveraging public-private partnerships: While the refined and tested ALP model has shown to work during the pilot period, it became clear that its implementation and potentially its scale-up would require additional resources. This is especially true for the implementation of the productive pathway of the refined model. However, it was also learned that costs can be significantly minimised by linking up with locally available small scale private enterprises and local business places like tea rooms and restaurants to cater skill trainees with minimum cost. Schools, for example, can establish partnerships with small scale private enterprises, which can serve as trainers that may provide hands-up training for learners under the productive pathway. This can be done systematically if it is complemented by tailor made training manual that fits the need of the trainees. The experience from Shebedino woreda attest to this experience.

The lessons from the pilot have shown further that implementation the refined model through public-private partnerships will not have been realised without the commitment of the local government. In contexts where there are no local TVET centres close to the

community, the local government (at woreda and kebele levels) will have to look for different options to provide training spaces (shelters) or raw materials and tools to enable the successful provision of the skills trainings. To this end, local government structures (be it in the education or TVET sectors) need to create and cultivate the required understanding and partnerships with local businesses and entrepreneurs to make this happen. When faced with a similar challenge, implementing partners in Ethiopia, in collaboration with Hawassa Poly Technic College, negotiated with private businesses (such as motorbike garage owners) and managed to secure agreements to use their space for skill training free of charge.

F. **Collaboration and coordination with stakeholders:** There is often a misunderstanding that the education sector is the only responsible organ for accelerated education programming. However, other sectors, such as TVETs or labour and social affairs have a key role to plan. During the pilot period, important milestones have been achieved owing to collaborative efforts with different stakeholders. The importance of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination came out vividly during the implementation of the pilot. While public vocational skills training colleges were involved in the provision of skills training for productive pathway learners, city/town administration offices and labour and social affairs bureaus were part of efforts to look for self-employment opportunities for skills training graduates. Women and children bureaus at different levels were also critical in making sure the relevant government stakeholders are able to coordinate their efforts in support of the children, particularly in those in the productive pathway.

G. **Leadership at the national level:** While the back2school project has identified and tested the key enhancements to the existing accelerated education programming, a broader adoption and

scale-up of the refined accelerated learning programme at national level requires governments' leadership at the highest level. Given the involvement of the Ministry of Education (MOE) throughout the project, the Ministry is expected to take the lead in bringing all education actors together to forge consensus on the refined ALP model, set standards and guidelines and implement a harmonised accelerated learning programme across the country.

H. **Capacity of ALP structures at regional and woreda levels:** One of the key findings of the pilot testing is the role of accelerated education programme structures within government education bureaus at all levels. It was learned that a more robust implementation of accelerated learning programme exists in regions where there are clear government structures mandated to lead and oversee the implementation of the programme. In this regard, as our capacity assessment has shown, Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) that have a dedicated unit to oversee and manage ALP work (e.g. Sidama region), have implemented the programme better than other regions. Other Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) are expected to have similar structures which, among other things, will work to develop their capacity to execute, scale, iterate, and engage in continuous improvement.

I. **The need to have a gendered perspective:** Noting that girls in Ethiopia are disproportionately likely to dropout or never enter school due to poverty, gender-based violence, and harmful practices, the back2school project in Ethiopia made sure more girls were purposely identified and enrolled in the pilot classes. In the ten pilot classes we reached through this project, it was possible to reach more girls and ensure most of them were also able to complete their classes successfully. This needs to be scaled up both in scope as well as depth of impact. We have also seen from our evidence and actual implementation of the pilot that, timetable, and location flexibility, as well as increased

scope of accelerated education programmes can increase the accessibility of the accelerated education programmes for most disadvantaged over-age out-of-school children, particularly rural girls. The importance of making academic timetables less rigid than the regular school time and less intensive than formal schools came out strongly as being beneficial to more girls getting back to school. Meaningful engagement of communities, in particular women, in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of accelerated education programmes is also crucial.

Student Story
Nagaan Mohammed

Nagaan Mohammed was one of the students enrolled in one of the pilot Back2School Academic Pathway classes for children aged 12-14 in Dire Dawa. She was interviewed on a monitoring visit.

Nagaan Mohammed is a 13-year-old girl from the outskirts of Dire Dawa. Nagaan is the youngest child in a big family of 10 children. Before enrolling in the Luminos program, Nagaan and her siblings had never been to school.

Now, Nagaan's teacher, Yasin, says "She is the best reader of the class." her teacher Yasin says. Nagaan enjoys reading and singing songs in the classroom.

"When I get home from school, all I want to do is read" she says. Nagaan holds the role of classroom "officer," ensuring that class rules are being

respected. "I love my classroom role. I like making sure everything is in order in the classroom" says Nagaan when asked what she likes about her classroom job.

Nagaan wants to continue her education and dreams of one day becoming an engineer. "I would like to build so many things for my country. I want to serve my country".

Nagaan hopes her siblings will have the same opportunity she did to catch up on their education, as she believes education is crucial for achieving one's dreams.

10. WAY FORWARD

Accelerated education programmes in Ethiopia are contributing towards creating equitable access to quality education for hundreds of thousands of over-age out-of-school children and youth in the country. Despite the lack of flexibility in timing and location, absence of alternative pathways for the upper age bracket of children (15-17), and limited capacity to enrol out-of-school children in significant numbers, existing programmes are benefiting a lot of children including girls to get back to school. Completion rates as well as improved learning outcomes among accelerated education programme graduates are both highly encouraging as evidenced by former learners of accelerated education programmes outperforming their peers in formal schools. The activity-based classroom instruction, the follow-on support provided, the manageable class size, and performance-based accountability mechanisms that are put in place by different actors are key factors that have contributed to the success of these programmes in Ethiopia.

Despite these encouraging efforts and progress overall, it is evident that there is an urgent need for further adaptation and scaling up of existing accelerated education programmes. The number of out-of-school in the country remains staggeringly high, and existing programmes that are designed to bring these children back to school are limited in coverage

and scope. To be able to reach and provide access to quality education for over-age out-of-school children in Ethiopia, it is imperative to explore a range of ways of enhancing the existing programmes and adopting more effective approaches for scaling impact. In this regard, the experiences, and lessons from the implementation of the back2school project in Ethiopia showed the importance of prioritizing three actions:

1. **Increase the scope of existing accelerated education programmes:** Given the magnitude of the problem of out of school children, it is essential to increase the size and geographical scope of existing programmes to be able to reach hundreds of thousands of over-age out-of-school children every year and even more across the country.

2. **Introduce more flexibility:** A key aspect of our effort to bring back over age out-of-school children is to minimize and eventually eliminate dropouts from ongoing accelerated education programmes. To this end, it is important to introduce flexibility in academic timetables (aligned with the needs of out-of-school children and their families) as well as teaching locations (such as considering having classrooms or centres closer to communities where it is needed most).

3. **Provide alternative pathways to education and training:** While efforts should be geared towards bringing children back to formal school, it is important not to lose sight of children who may not be able to return to school for various reasons. In such instances, providing vocational skills training as an option to cater for the needs of children, especially in the upper age bracket (aged 15-17), should be considered.

These measures can and should be taken urgently. The enabling policy environment, the structures that are put in place at different levels, and the commitment of the government and non-government actors to address the challenges of out-of-school children provide a fertile ground for the implementation of accelerated education programmes at scale.