

**Summary mid-term review report of
“Reintegration of street children and community-based child protection in SNNPR,
Ethiopia”**

October 2014

Implemented by Retrak Ethiopia

Funded by Cordaid

Retrak has 20 years experience of working with street children in Africa and seven years operational history in Ethiopia. Retrak Ethiopia works with full-time street children to give them a real alternative to life on the street. Retrak’s records showed that a significant proportion of children met in Addis Ababa came from Ethiopia’s southern region particularly from the town of Hossana and the surrounding area. As a result, a plan was developed to address some of the push factors that were leading many children to come to the city.

With support from Cordaid, a pilot 3-year community project was planned in the area (October 2012-September 2015), as well as support for reintegrating children into the area from Addis Ababa. Adjustments to the project were subsequently made to include a greater emphasis on education at the Addis Ababa drop-in centre and to start a new drop-in centre in Hossana town to catch children before they reach the capital. The long term project objective is to improve the wellbeing, support and protection of 2,964 vulnerable children and increase the knowledge, abilities and wellbeing of 1,013 household caregivers and community members. In doing this the project will change attitudes and behaviours, reduce stigma, and respond to and prevent further abuse and exploitation of children in target communities.

The project comprises six objectives:

1. Outreach and service provision to street children living unsupported on the streets in Addis Ababa and Hossana;
2. Participation of street children in education and life skills at drop-in centres in Addis Ababa and Hossana;
3. Reintegration of street children with their families in SNNPR, and support to caregivers;
4. Establishment of child-led Child Welfare Clubs (CWCs) with a focus on child protection issues;
5. Participation of vulnerable women in Self Help Groups (SHGs) leading to greater economic security and participation in family and community decision making; and



New drop-in centre in Hossana

6. Community education to promote child protection.

This mid-term review gathered information from ongoing monitoring and dedicated activities involving beneficiaries and staff, in order to assess progress to date and generate learning for taking the project forward and for informing similar projects in other locations.

Results

In light of the output and outcome results, it can be deemed that the project has been successfully implemented in the first two years. 471 children have been contacted on the streets, 447 have received services at drop-in centres in Addis Ababa and Hossana (newly established in May 2014), including education and life skills, and 160 have been reintegrated with their families in SNNPR. As a result, the wellbeing of children has improved dramatically, with an almost complete elimination of risk. Children's wellbeing when they are placed back in to the care of their family also improves overall.

A new community project has been established in Duna, Gibe and Soro Woredas, where 355 women have joined 18 SHGs, over 2,000 children have participated in activities led by 11 CWCs and over 500 community members have received education through 17 workshops. Awareness raising activities focused on child trafficking, and specifically targeting bus station workers and police, has led to over 90 children being rescued.

Wellbeing assessments of SHG members and their children in the community revealed they are at risk in several areas, however improvements have been achieved especially in the area of skills and work for caregivers and in parental care for children. This links to the emphasis in the SHGs on savings and loans and on education around parenting skills and child protection. Through the SHGs, savings have reached an average of 230birr (\$12) per household and nearly all members have plans to increase their income. Stories from these women revealed that there has been an impact on parenting skills, empowerment and overcoming discrimination or lack of self-worth. The women are more aware of the risks children face on the streets or through child labour and there is an increased desire to get their children home. The women show great determination to succeed and avoid past mistakes once a new option is open to them.



Volley ball at the new drop-in centre in Hossana

Improvement in savings, loans and work is important since economic activity is limited in the area. Whilst the SHG households have a cash income of around 530birr (\$27) per month on average, this mainly comes from the sale of goods. Agricultural land and livestock ownership is below the national average, and child work and labour is common with 92% of 12-14 years involved in household work, and nearly 10% undertaking paid work outside the household.

Child protection issues have also been addressed through the CWCs which have used peer-to-peer activities to raise awareness of issues including: street life, child trafficking, education and work. Anecdotal evidence, which needs to be explored further, suggests this is improving children's attendance at school and reducing drop outs.

The community see child labour as one of the top child protection risks in the community, along with physical abuse and FGM. Other sources of harm for children in these communities are parental lack of awareness of healthy parenting, child abuses, and child protection and parents' death or divorce. Girls are seen to be more abused than boys, with some unique sources of harm for girls including early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). These child protection issues are addressed either through the traditional or the government structure. Although the traditional structures maybe preferred initially, the punishments imposed are perceived to be lenient. The decisions made by the government structure can be more satisfactory, but the process takes a long time to conclude. Not all child protection incidents are reported because of lack of awareness on child protection issues and on the available structures through which they can be addressed. Some of these issues will be further addressed in year 3 of the project with a goal to build capacity to aid implementation of child protection policies.



CWC members

Review of SHGs and CWCs

The review of the SHGs by an independent assessor, project team and beneficiaries revealed that the approach is well adopted and accepted in these communities, leading to changes in women's lives and those of their children as already mentioned. The project has successfully adapted and followed the Tearfund/KHC model, with only a few areas not being implemented so far. The SHGs therefore do still need close follow-up to improve on certain skills such as rotational leadership, documenting bylaws and other business skills. The SHGs are now in a position to establish the next stage of the SHG approach, with the establishment of Cluster Level Associations (CLAs). Due to the local situation, this will be pursued despite the fact that the number of SHG in each Woreda is less than the ideal number.

The review of the CWCs with children, school staff and project team revealed that this approach has been harder to progress. Working through mentors in schools is difficult, especially when there is an expectation of per diems for activities to be completed. Frequent meetings must be pursued and alternative means of motivating mentors could be sought. The CWCs work is also being complemented by football clubs set up with out-of-school children. This is an additional activity, but it has provided a useful opportunity for the project staff to engage children beyond the schools hosting the CWCs and include them in receiving the same child wellbeing messages.

Most significant story

A story gathered as part of this review tells of the experience of one of the SHG members. She is mother to 9, her husband has no job and she supports the family by selling 'injira' (local food). Through the SHG she has been able to save and take a loan to improve her business. She has also learnt new parenting skills through the group.

"I raised my children far from what has been taught to me here since the first day of our lesson. I used to punish my children by hitting them hard, accuse them for all mistakes, curse and insult them unceasingly,

chase them with an axe, tied them using rope and hit them, used my teeth to bite them. But I never thought this could harm them or that I could be wrong in the eye of the law.”

One day her 14 year old daughter made a mistake and was so afraid of the punishment she left home and was too afraid to return. Through the SHG meeting her mother realised: “my children are not the one who made the mistake. It is me who made the mistake. Had it been I continued with this way, all my children could have left home and gone to the street.” She then left the meeting and invited her daughter to come home.



Saving money at a SHG

There has been an improvement in the way she is treating her children, and they are becoming less aggressive and happier. Her daughter testifies to this change: “My mother has changed a lot. She still gets annoyed but she becomes calm quicker. She has stopped her former way of hitting us all. I have also decided to continue my education next year. My mother has become kind to me.”

Recommendations for this project

The following recommendations to strengthen the project, with a particular focus on the new community-based activities, are put forward for consideration by the Retrak Ethiopia, in consultation with Cordaid.

- Continuing to hold discussions around parenting skills, child protection and child development, since these are clearly impacting the wellbeing of children.
- Reinforcing with the SHGs the importance of written bylaws for each group and the need to follow rules consistently so that members do not fall into absenteeism.
- Working with the SHGs and CDWs to improve the practice of rotational leadership, thus allowing as many women as a possible the opportunity to build up their leadership skills.
- Setting clear milestones to help each cluster of 6 SHGs to establish and run a CLA in each Woreda. This should include a phase out of CDWs direct involvement with the SHGs, as the CLAs should provide this support.
- Continuing to support SHGs to think about individual and group income generating activities, as well as encouraging them to look for opportunities for community social change projects, especially as the CLAs develop.
- Considering if there is a way to boost the internal capital of the SHGs so that they are able to provide larger loans with longer repayment periods.
- Seeking ways to strengthen the work of the CWCs through continued regular meetings with mentors to help review and plan activities. Whilst it is not appropriate to offer per diems, it might be possible to find a suitable thank you gift to reward and acknowledge the work they are doing.
- Continuing to work with out-of-school children through football clubs and ensure these activities are adequately monitored.
- Continuing to provide community education activities with the aim of enabling implementation of child protection policies. This should continue to include a focus on trafficking and the work in this

area needs to be specifically monitored. In addition, since FGM is considered a top child protection issues the project should consider if this issue can be addressed now or in the future, perhaps in collaboration with others who are specialists in this area.

- Beginning to plan for phase two and developing a medium/ long term exit strategy to ensure sustainability of the SHGs and any other activities.

In addition, in the area of M&E, consideration should be given to adding new indicators for additional activities of trafficking awareness raising and football clubs; ensuring community education sessions are well documented; tracking trafficking prevention and school drop outs; new ways to track outcomes with CWCs and football clubs; adjusting the economic survey; and providing repeat and more in-depth training for staff.

In the area of HR, consideration should be given to reviewing the current remuneration of CDWs in light of experience and recruiting support staff, possibly from within the community as this has proven strategic in building good relationships and tackling dependency; providing further training to staff; recruiting an M&E Officer; and reviewing staff induction and supervision, and the link between the Addis Ababa management and the Hossana-based staff.

Recommendations for future projects

The success of the project lends itself to replication and scale up, within Ethiopia and beyond.

Consideration should be given to:

- Options for replicating the project in the 2 remaining Woredas in Hadyia zone and in Wolyita, another area from where many street children are coming.
- The culture of dependency in any future locations, building on lessons learnt about how to deal with this.
- The workload on CDWs and the balance of different activities, which may vary with the particular needs of the location.
- The need for a vehicle to ease transport around the project area.
- Establishing clear M&E procedures, so that staff members are trained in these during their induction, and they can run from day 1 and be used to collect baseline information.



CWC peer education session

This report was written by Tewodros Shibru and Joanna Wakia, October 2014. © Retrak, 2014

The full report can be requested from: mailbox@retrak.org