2022

ETHIOPIA

A spotlight report
on the progress and
challenges of SDG 4
and 5 in Ethiopia

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year Ethiopia is submitting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) and reporting on their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The last VNR was submitted in 2017 before the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and conflict happened in the country. These consecutive crises have put the nation at risk of losing years of progress made.

Prior to COVID-19 Ethiopia has made progress towards SDG 4 through policy reform and creation. To improve access and quality of education, the government introduced policies like the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQUIP). Understanding that change and transformation must be resourced, the government also notably allocates 25% of the national budget towards education.[1] Such progressive steps still left gaps that resulted in enrolment disparities between girls and boys, further supporting the need for gender- responsive budgeting and programs. With the onset of the pandemic and school closures, Ethiopia struggled to provide access to education to all children, especially girls. 50% of students reported not receiving any learning materials during school closures. From one crisis to the next, education continued to be hit with blows against progress. November 2020 armed conflict erupted in the north, which further destabilised the education sector and forced schools to close. More than 8,660 schools across Ethiopia are fully or partially damaged, 70% of which were in Afar, Amhara and Tigray.[2] As Ethiopia continues to deal with the conflict, a severe drought hits between October 2021 and mid-April 2022, displacing more than 344,000 people in search of water, pasture and assistance.[3]

Making progressive strides, Ethiopia has ratified several international treaties and conventions and made efforts to nationalise them to embed them within the nation's policy. Despite political reform, Ethiopia still has one of the highest incidences of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Sub-saharan Africa. Harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage still haunt women and girls. Ethiopia has the 14th highest prevalence of child marriage in the world and 25 million girls and women have undergone FGM/C, the largest absolute number in Eastern and Southern Africa. It is evident that it will take more than political reform to make Ethiopia a gender inclusive nation. The effects of the northern conflict makes girls and women suffer at a disproportionate rate. COVID-19 and now the drought are causing family structures to become more stressful and we must consider the undue burden of care that women and girls face that is further exacerbated now.

As Education Champions for the Malala Fund, focusing on gender and access to education, we are using this spotlight report to highlight the intersectionalities between SDG 4 and SDG 5. This report highlights the gains made from the last VNR and how global and national crises are threatening progress within basic education and gender. Based on our experience as CSOs and NGOs working within these sectors, and our extensive research we make several recommendations to the Ethiopian government to protect women and girls rights now, and to prepare to build back a gender equal nation that makes education and rights accessible to women and girls.

Introduction

This year, as Ethiopia prepares to submit its second Voluntary National Review (VNR), we take a look at the progress the country has made on two critically interconnected goals - quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5).

There are strong interdependencies and synergies between education and gender. Education expands opportunities for girls and young women and raises their aspirations for work outside the home.[4] Greater educational attainment shapes attitudes of both girls and boys to gender equality, with greater education leading to more positive attitudes towards gender equality among both males and females.[5] Education, particularly secondary education, can empower women to overcome discrimination, claim their rights and partake in decision-making, as well as being a route to decent work.[6][7]

Since 2015 Ethiopia has shown a commitment to achieving Agenda 2030, integrating the SDGs into a number of national policies and strategies. Over the last two decades, the Ethiopian government has expanded its education system and made important gains for girls at the primary and secondary levels. However, harmful traditional practices, social norms and poverty continue to prevent girls from completing their education, resulting in high dropout rates at the secondary level.

This progress is now under threat due to a wave of global and national crises that have severely impacted the hard earned gains made on education and gender. The global COVID-19 pandemic resulted in long school closures are forcing girls — particularly in regional states — into child marriage and increasing the rates of gender-based violence. Limited access to distance learning initiatives hindered many girls from continuing their studies at home, leading to months of learning loss. After long school closures due to the global pandemic and challenges building back after numerous waves of COVID-19 the country is now in the midst of a regional conflict, which brings further challenges and risks to safeguard education and gender equality in Ethiopia.

Progress on SDGs Prior to Covid-19 and conflict

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality Education promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Education policies and budgeting

Ethiopia has made some notable progress on education, particularly in the area of policy. The 1994 Education and Training Policy has been the basis for supporting the right to education up to secondary level and outlines the government's commitment to provide financial support up to grade 10.[8] The government of Ethiopia has introduced the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQUIP), which has focused on improving equity and access so as to reduce current rates of drop-out and improve completion and progression to secondary schooling. The School Improvement Programme (SIP), and a series of Education Sector Development Programmes (ESDP-I to ESDP-VI) (SIP), have put the emphasis on enhancing student achievement through better teaching and learning processes. The Ministry of Education (MOE) also launched an Education Roadmap, intended to guide the entire education system for the next 15 years.

Most notably Ethiopia allocates a quarter (25%) of its national budget to the education sector,[9] in line with the Incheon Declaration benchmarks.[10] However, addressing the education challenges not only requires a decent size and share of funding for education, but for education budgets to be designed in a way to address inequality in the education system. While the Ministry of Finance has developed guidelines for gender-responsive budgeting, which all sectors are expected to use, these are still not effectively mainstreamed and utilised, therefore limiting the gender-transformative potential of Ethiopia's sizable education budget.

Access to education

Over the last two decades, the Ethiopian government has expanded its education system and made important gains for girls at the primary and secondary levels. The net enrolment rate in elementary school increased from 29% in 1989 to 86% in 2017.[11] The same year the Gender Parity Index also reached 0.90 at the primary level and 0.87 at the secondary level.[12]

According to the government's 2017 VNR primary level enrollment had improved from 39% in 2014/15 to 49.9% in 2015/16. Secondary level enrollment saw similar progress, increasing from 39.8% to 44.8% over the same period.[13]

Enrollment of girls, however, remains lower across both levels of education, suggesting the need for increased and gender-targeted effort to bring up the rate of enrolment of female students.[14] Traditional gender norms and a high burden of domestic work remain barriers to girls' access to education. Access is often limited to children in urban and semi-urban areas, with children from poorer backgrounds more likely to enrol later and make slower progress.[15] Enrollment of children with disabilities is poor and those who are in school have low completion rates because of inadequate support.[16] Many of the out-of-school children are from pastoralist, internally displaced or refugee communities since the current education system is not set up to cater for these communities.

Quality of education

These remarkable achievements in terms of gross enrollment have not yet aligned with that of the quality education and learning outcomes. In fact, the positive achievement of getting more children into school has strained the capacity of the system, and student learning has suffered. An estimated 63% of students in lower primary school not achieving the basic learning outcomes needed to succeed higher up the education ladder.[17]

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Policies on gender and women's empowerment

Ethiopia achieved significant gains in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in various fronts, particularly at the policy level. Ethiopia has ratified several international treaties and conventions and made efforts to nationalise them. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. More recently Ethiopia has also ratified the Maputo protocol, which will serve as an additional framework for gender equality.

At a national level, the Ethiopian Constitution gives women equal rights to men. The Ethiopian penal code criminalizes domestic violence and harmful traditional practices including early marriage, abduction and female genital mutilation.[18] A Women's Policy and Strategy and Women's Development Package was created with bodies to ensure implementation of gender policies.[19]

The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs had put in place policies on eliminating harmful practices, such as forced and child marriage and female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C). Currently the women policy, that was promulgated in 1993, is in the process of being revised and a new gender policy is being drafted. A Gender Roadmap and policy on addressing gender based violence (GBV) are also underway to improve commitments towards eliminating discrimination against women.

Despite this progress, Ethiopia still has a way to go to ensure all legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the SDG indicator are in place. Only 41.7% legal frameworks with a focus on violence against women, are in place, compared to 81.8% on marriage and family.[20] The country is still lacking a policy focused on girls and considerations for girls are often missing in different sectoral policies and strategies.

Gender-based violence and harmful practices

Significant gender inequalities persist in Ethiopia depriving women of rights and opportunities and hampering their participation in development endeavours. Ethiopia is among the countries with the lowest score on the Gender Inequality Index (GNI) - ranking 121 out of 160 countries.[21]

Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of gender based violence (GBV) among countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It's estimated that half of all women in Ethiopia have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.[22] While there are laws which outlaw it, rates of gender-based violence in Ethiopia remain high. In many areas, traditional cultural values around the treatment of women are deeply entrenched and many people ignore or are simply unaware of new laws. The Ethiopian Gender Development Index found that 63% of women believe a woman should be beaten for violating a social role and[23] both women and men believe that husbands are justified for beating their wives for "bad behaviour", such as burning food, neglecting children or leaving the home without informing their husband."[24] and many people ignore or are simply unaware of new laws.

The prevalence of these harmful practices like FGM/C and child marriage remains high in Ethiopia. Child marriage remain's one of the most significant gendered challenges in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has the 14th highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, and has the fourth highest absolute number of women married or in a union before the age of 18 globally – 2,276,000.[25] This equates to around 40% of girls in Ethiopia are married before the age of 18 and 14% are married before their 15th birthday.[26] The Amhara region records the highest rates of child marriage in Ethiopia, with approximately 45% of girls getting married before the age of 18 years. UNICEF has also identified hotspots for child marriage in the regions of Oromia, Gambella and Somali.[27] Child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of a lack of education. Increasing access to safe, free, quality education, therefore, is one of the best ways to tackle child marriage, as 68% of Ethiopian girls with no education were married before the age of 18, compared to 13% who completed secondary education.[28]

Tied to early, forced and child marriage is the practice of female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C), which is a traditional practice used to control female sexuality and can be seen as a precursor to marriage.[29][30] In Ethiopia, 25 million girls and women have under one FGM/C, the largest absolute number is Eastern and Southern Africa.[31] Overall, 65% of women aged 15-65 years have experienced FGM/C and among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years, 47% have undergone the practice. Some Ethiopian girls who do not undergo FGM/C are told they will be unable to find a husband, and some parents fear that if they do not engage in FGM/C they will be socially sanctioned by the community.[32] Similarly to child marriage, education is critical to eliminating the practice of FGM/C, since 41% of girls and women with no education support the continuation of FGM/C compared to 5% of girls and women with secondary or higher education.[33]

Women's participation in leadership and unpaid care

Ethiopia has made remarkable progress in women leadership in the formal and informal sector. From 2015 to 2017 hundreds of thousands of women benefited from government agriculture activities that made agricultural work and services more accessible to women in many rural parts of Ethiopia.

Significant achievement has also been made in promoting women's political participation, with women occupying 50% of the cabinet of ministers.[34] As of 2020 women make up 39% of seats in the national parliament, compared to the 7.69% in 2004.[35] Active participation of women in leadership is important to ensure planning and budgeting are gender responsive and that inclusivity is not ignored.[36] Nevertheless, with a 25.4% gender gap in the share of seats in parliament.,[37] Ethiopia still has a long way to go to ensure equal occupation of men and women in political and decision-making spaces. Similar gender disparities are prevalent in other institutions, such as the police force, in the judiciary and the office of the attorney general. Ethiopia still has a long way to go to ensure equal occupation of men and women in political and decision-making spaces.

This is in part due to traditional gender norms that dictate different expectations, roles and responsibilities for men and women. Despite some significant progress in women's leadership and decision-making, many still believe that the role of women first and foremost is to be wives and mothers. As such, even among women who work, the burden of unpaid domestic and child care predominantly falls on their shoulders.[38] The proportion of women collecting water and firewood (71% and 54%, respectively) is twice that of men (29% and 28%, respectively). Even when men and women both contribute to the domestic care, women tend to spend significantly more time on care duties than men.[39]

The impact of Covid and conflict on the achievement of SDGs

Since the submission of Ethiopia's first VNR the country has experienced multiple waves of crises that are putting the futures of women and girls at even greater risk. In March 2020 thegovernment of Ethiopia closed its schools in response to COVID-19 and soon after ordered anationwide lockdown. With girls already at a disadvantage, the efforts made by the pre-pandemicgovernment came to a complete stop. The pandemic did not only have health implications, but adversely affected women and girls. Unable to move or make a living, women and girls were leftvulnerable to physical and financial abuse . The pandemic's effects are still being felt today.

Since November 2020, there has been an armed conflict between the Tigrayan forces and theEthiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), causing a gender and education crisis. The crisis hasexpanded to neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. Thousands of schools have been damagedand the ones left standing are used as IDP shelters.[40]

The education and gender challenges, as a result of the on-going conflict and war between thefederal government and the Tigrian forces, has been exacerbated by climate shocks, includingerratic rainfalls and devastating drought that has been reportedly the worst in 40 years. Ethiopia is highly dependent on rain-fed agriculture and natural resources, and it is amongst the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Following three consecutive failed rainy seasons since late 2020, Ethiopia is now facing one of the most severe droughts in East Africa, with more than 8 million people affected across the southern and south-eastern parts of the country,[41] including Somali (3.5 million people affected), Oromia (3.4 million), Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) (1.1 million) and South West (200,000) regions.[42]
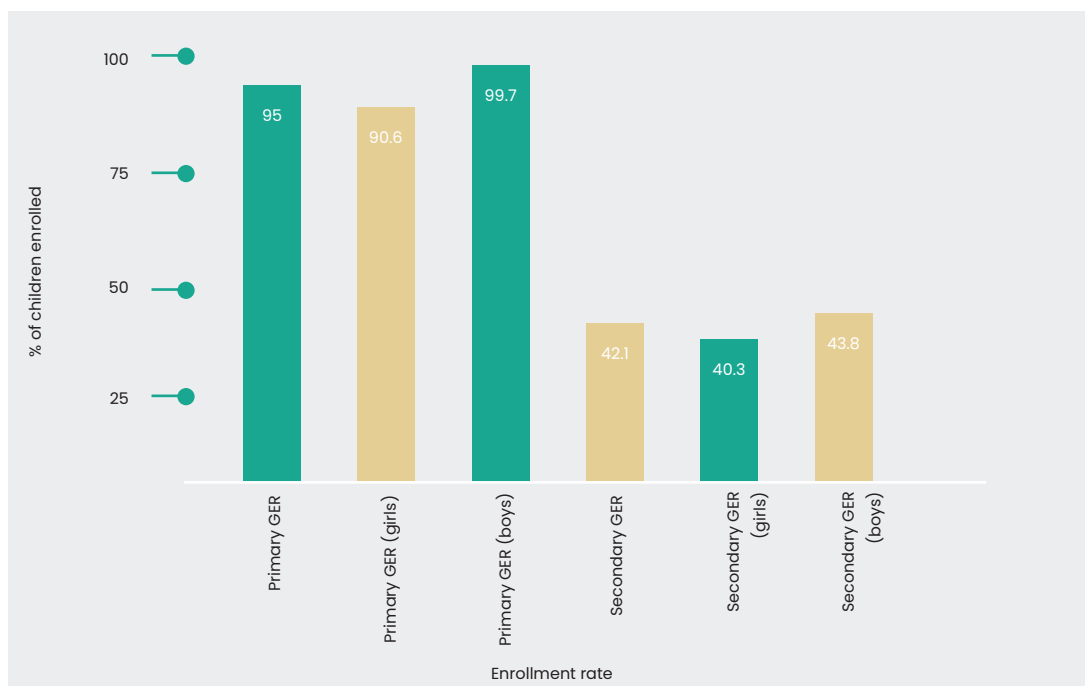
SDG 4 : Quality Education

Access to education

Access to education is being assaulted by a wave of crisis. First COVID, for which the country and the education system, is still feeling the effects, and now the ongoing conflict and shocks, such as drought and food insecurity, are significantly impacting children's access to education.

During the onset of the COVID- 19 pandemic schools were forced to close to curtail the spread of the virus. In Ethiopia schools were closed between March and October 2020, equating to seven months of closures and creating a national girls' education crisis.
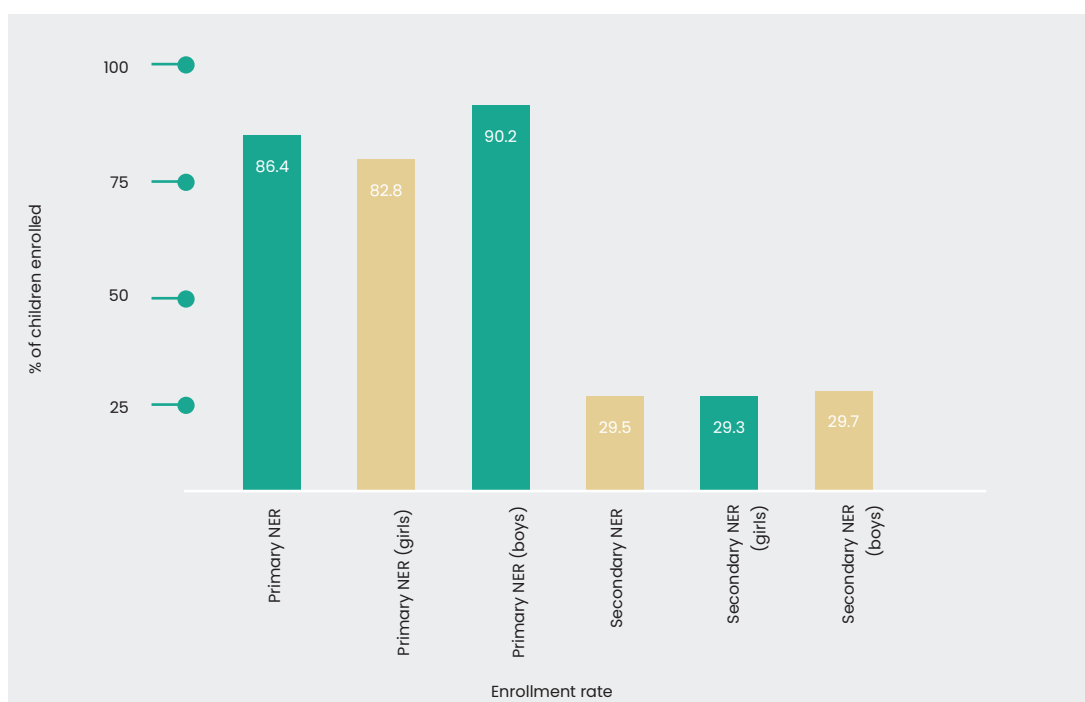
Nevertheless, Ethiopia continues to make strides towards access, particularly at primary level (see graph). Secondary enrollment, however, still falls far behind compared to primary level, indicating high drop-out rates after primary school. Wide variations persist between regions in gross enrollment rates (GER), with Afar having the lowest GER and Gambella very high gross enrollment both in the primary and secondary education.[43]

Gross enrolment rate at primary & secondary Level by gender

% of children enrolled

Primary GER — 95
Primary GER (girls) — 90.6
Primary GER (boys) — 99.7
Secondary GER — 42.1
Secondary GER (girls) — 40.3
Secondary GER (boys) — 43.8

Enrollment rate

Government of Ethiopia Education Statistics Annual Abstract, October 2021

Gross enrolment rate at primary & secondary Level by gender

% of children enrolled

Primary NER — 86.4
Primary NER (girls) — 82.8
Primary NER (boys) — 90.2
Secondary NER — 29.5
Secondary NER (girls) — 29.3
Secondary NER (boys) — 29.7

Enrollment rate

Government of Ethiopia Education Statistics Annual Abstract, October 2021

Just one month after Ethiopia started the process of reopening schools conflict broke out in Northern Ethiopia, creating a number of new barriers to education. Any previous efforts to build or improve school infrastructure have been undone as a result of the North Ethiopia conflict. Humanitarian reports suggest that 8,660 schools across Ethiopia are fully or partially damaged, 70% of which were in Afar, Amhara and Tigray.[44] Many schools have been forced to close due to insecurity, while others are being used to shelter IDPs. The education system has ceased to function in Tigray due to the conflict which has exacerbated food insecurity among students, and made it difficult to pay teachers salaries or supply schools with the necessary learning materials. There are estimated 1.4 million children in Tigray entering their third year without access to learning.[45]

Between October 2021 and mid-April 2022, more than 344,000 people have been displaced in search of water, pasture and assistance, including 175,000 people in Somali Region and 139,000 people in southern Oromia Region.[46] Children's education is increasingly affected with school dropout rate increasing due to families migrating to better-off areas and due to lack of water sources at schools. More than 2,000 schools are closed including 1,800 schools in Somali, 334 schools in East and West Hararghe zones in Oromia regions alone, affecting more than 682,000 students.[47]

More than 2.9 million children across Ethiopia remain out of school, including 2.53 million due to conflict and 401,000 due to drought.[48] This represents 17% of the school age population.[49] Almost 50% of those out of school children are entering their third year without any access to learning, heightening the risk of a lost generation for children in northern Ethiopia.[50]

Quality education

Challenges with access to learning and quality remained major barriers during the pandemic. Despite efforts from the government to set up alternative pathways for learning during lockdown, a rapid survey found that access to the government's TV and radio distance learning lessons was limited. During the pandemic 50% of students reported they received no learning assistance at all and [51] only 3% of households in Addis Ababa reported receiving education related materials directly from the government, schools or education department.[52] and 50% of students reported they received no learning assistance at all. [53] Students experienced a significant reduction in learning time, with 50% of students spending only two hours a day on study, compared to the five to six hours prior to the pandemic.[54] Around 30% of students reported the quality of their learning had declined.[55]

SDG 5: Gender Equality

There's no surprise that in times of conflict and crisis gender equality is affected. In the last VNR it was noted that" male-biassed attitudinal behaviours and practices exist in every section of society."[56] In a society already facing unfair male preferences, SDG 5 suffered additional setbacks once the pandemic hit, followed by a series of national crises.

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls

The pandemic did not only have health implications, but adversely affected women and girls. Unable to move or make a living, women and girls were left vulnerable to physical and financial abuse.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and the response of governments in the sub-region to the pandemic, created conditions under which many of the drivers of GBV thrived. For example, during lockdown with limitations on movement and other restrictions women and girls were often secluded with their abusers in the same location." [57] Both women and men noticed the increase of GBV, with 73.6% of women and 61.9% of men believing that the incidence of GBV increased during COVID-19.[58]

Eliminate all harmful practices

The harmful effects of the pandemic have lasting ripple effects for girls and young women that will be felt years down the line. The UN predicts there could be an extra 13 million child marriages by 2030 as COVID-19 hits household incomes and stymies global efforts to end the practice.[59] This is a major concern towards the gains made to eliminate child marriage.

Now many in conflict-affected and drought-affected areas are faced with consequences of the drought, which is leading to food shortages and a lack of drinking water. Rural communities are hit hardest, given they rely on rearing livestock and growing their own crops, both to eat and to sell for income. The drought has made their way of life impossible. This is leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods and forcing families to resort to negative coping mechanisms..

In these desperate circumstances, families may resort to marrying their daughters off to wealthier families, believing that their daughters will have better chances of survival this way, and they can also use the money from the daughter's dowry to feed their other children.

According to UNICEF child marriage has increased by an average of 119 % across regions worst hit by the drought – Somali (264%); Oromia (69%); and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNP (8%) – between January and April 2021 and the same period in 2022.[60]

Burden of domestic and unpaid care

The burden of domestic and unpaid care on women and girls has been exacerbated by the multiple crises of the last few years. During COVID, girls and women were seen to bear the greatest burden of increased household chores and care for children/siblings or ill relatives during the pandemic. Young Lives found that 70% of young women spent more time on household work, compared to only 26% of young men.[61] Similarly, 44% of young women reported spending more time on childcare, compared to only 24% of young men.[62] The increasing childcare responsibilities resulting from school closures meant women faced more severe economic consequences resulting from the pandemic.[63]

Now family structures become more stressful as the drought also worsens across Ethiopia and the undue burden of care that women and girls face is further exacerbated. Women and girls have reduced access to medical and reproductive care, as well as support for newborns and mothers. After fleeing their homes women are building temporary shelters to protect their families as they move around. [64]

Conclusion and Recommendations

Prior to a series of crises that has hit Ethiopia, the country had been making steady progress towards SDG 4 and 5. However, a seven month pandemic-related school closure, followed by an ongoing conflict and other humanitarian crisis are putting these hard earned gains at risk. Concrete action must be taken to safeguard the rights of women and girls and access to safe, free, quality education.

Protect Now

• All national actors involved in the conflict must protect and guarantee the fulfillment of the right to quality education for all, by providing, safe and accessible learning environments for all learners without any discrimination. This includes:

  • Not attacking, targeting schools or students, nor co-opting classrooms for military bases.
  • Ensuring that girls and women, learners with disabilities, refugees and pastoralists have equal opportunities to fulfill their right to education in emergency contexts.

• Establish safe spaces for women and girls to enable them to participate in activities for empowerment, gain access to critical information on their risks, rights and needs.

• Support survivors of gender based and sexual violence with clinical health services, dignity kits, psychosocial support and the safe spaces they need to access care and protection. This should include information on how to access aid and where to report sexual exploitation and abuse.

Prepare to build back better

• Ethiopia should set intermediate benchmarks for 2025 and 2030 based to set a clear pathway towards SDG 4 and 5 goals and targets, taking into account the set back and lessons learned due to COVID and other crises.

• Ethiopia should join the 114 states around the world in endorsing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration and ensure that all learners and educators can learn and teach in safety.

• Provide remedial programmes and adapted curricula to address school drop-outs and learning loss from COVID, conflict and other crises and ensure they are delivered in safe and accessible environments.

• Ensure sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding for education in emergencies, by developing, implementing and mainstreaming gender-responsive and crisis-sensitive national education plans and budgets.

• Finalise, operationalise and fund the following gender and education policies and strategies, including the Education Training policy, Education Law , Early Child Development and Education framework, Gender Policy and Gender Based Violence Policy. Ensure these are accompanied with periodic, gender-responsive and publicly available monitoring frameworks to ensure effectiveness and accountability.

• Strengthen justice systems and train law enforcement, community leaders and teachers on how to better identify, report and prosecute cases of violence, so that women and girls who are subject to gender-based violence or early, forced and child marriage can get justice.

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