

Practice and Impact Brief: Learning during COVID-19 school closures

Teacher Development of Learning Worksheets

This is one of a series of Practice and Impact briefs drawn from Childhope’s experience implementing Excelling Against the Odds (EAO), partnering with CHADET in Ethiopia with support from UK Aid through the [Girls’ Education Challenge](#). EAO was implemented from 2014 to 2021 by Childhope and CHADET in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The aim was to improve the quality of primary and secondary education for over 16,400 girls in Arsi, South Gonder and South Wollo. This Practice and Impact brief captures how the project quickly adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the negative effects of school closures. The project responded by introducing locally created grade-level worksheets designed to keep girls in touch with their learning, while at the same time introducing new sustainable skills to teachers.

1. Background

On 16 March 2020, the Ethiopian government announced that, as part of broader measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, primary and secondary schools across the country would close with effect from 17 March. In response to the government’s announcement, ChildHope and CHADET worked together to develop two emergency plans:

- A plan for distributing essential health and hygiene materials¹ and one-off financial support for the most vulnerable girls
- An Education Response Plan

2. The Education Response Plan

The Education Response Plan focused on the need to act quickly, maintain continuity of the girls’ education and ascertain *how* the project would maintain educational delivery to project girls, some of whom lived in hard-to-reach areas. The Education Response Plan also considered the Ethiopian government’s plans to use local radio to broadcast school lessons. An investigation of the viability of the government’s intentions was built into the Education Response Plan .



Hygiene leaflet distributed to communities

As part of the Education Response Plan, the ChildHope-CHADET project surveyed the availability of technology to project girls. As a result, a decision was taken to contact 100% of the project girls (not

¹ This included sanitary pads and soap and the distribution of public health leaflets. The distribution of a one-off financial support payment also included a goodwill financial support payment to vulnerable members of local communities who were not associated with the project, as humanitarian aid.

use a representative sample) as the project aimed to continue to educate 100% of its girls during school closures.



Temperature screening during the distribution of materials

Project staff, local community workers and local community volunteers undertook socially distanced door-step surveys of all girls and their families to learn which girls had access to a phone, radio and television. Although access was higher than expected in some cases, it was still too low to rely on any technology as a means of delivering educational inputs. Of the 15,048 girls surveyed, only 17.6% of girls had access to a mobile, 19.4% to a radio, 6.5% to a TV and just 0.1% with TV and radio access. There

were added concerns about whether girls would have any access to, or control over, any technology available in their homes.

A decision was quickly made to develop and distribute learning worksheets to all the girls in the project, rather than relying on technology that was only available to a minority of girls. The distribution of the worksheets would be made simultaneously with the distribution of the health and hygiene materials and public health leaflets.

3. Learning worksheets

Worksheets were developed for mathematics, English and local language literacy (Amharic and Afan Oromo). Each subject was designed for most grades up to and including Grade 12. It was essential to ensure that all girls received worksheets specifically tailored to their grade, language and learning level. Hence, the project selected teachers from each grade and subject to develop the worksheets. Due to the distance, local topography and inherent difficulties in reaching many rural areas, worksheets were designed that contained sufficient activities for a few weeks' work. Students were encouraged to work at their own pace. Two sets of worksheets were created. The first set was revision-based, following the subject curriculum. A mark sheet was developed for each subject, where each question was worked through in its entirety, showing method and result. These were distributed to **12,000+** girls to assess their work and identify and correct their mistakes and areas for further revision.

Zone	Grades	Subjects	# of worksheets developed	Total worksheets	Total # of worksheets distributed
Arsi	G2 – G8	Afan Oromo English Mathematics	21 (3 subjects x 7 grades)	29	74,000+
	G9 – G12	English Mathematics	8 (2 subjects x 4 grades)		
South Gonder and South Wollo	G5 – G8	Amharic English Mathematics	12 (3 subjects x grades)	20	
	G9 – G12	English Mathematics	8 (2 subjects x 4 grades)		

The second set of worksheets were developed incorporating 50% new learning and 50% revision. These worksheets were more instructional. Subject topics and objectives were explained with worked examples and then followed by individual student work. Where possible, worksheets deepened understanding using educational models such as Bloom’s taxonomy of learning. The learning from the second set of worksheets was assessed on schools’ reopening and was incorporated into the government’s revision package.

In addition to learning worksheets, the project produced psychosocial support materials, which included exercises for the girls that were not curriculum-based but aimed to support their mental wellbeing. Activities included games, developing poems, art, etc.

4. Benefits and successes

There were many benefits and successes attributable to the development and distribution of learning worksheets. These included a continued focus on learning with high rates of engagement from project girls and teachers, which has had an impact on supporting school reopening and continuing professional development. It also helped to support the wellbeing of both teachers and girls.

Benefit 1: Continued learning

The development, production and distribution of the worksheets and the girls' participation in worksheet learning were remarkably successful.

First worksheet	
# girls received worksheet	12,292
Response/completion rate	91%
Completed papers marked/graded	100%
Second worksheet	
# girls received worksheet	12,455
Response/completion rate	88%
Completed papers marked/graded	100%

- **12,000+** girls received two or three worksheets each in both rounds of the distribution.
- The worksheet completion rate was high, suggesting that the girls were engaged with the learning model delivered by the project, even during school closures and through an unfamiliar delivery method.
- **100%** of the worksheets were marked by the teachers in round one, who further provided marking/assessment sheets for the girls to identify areas for improvement. In addition, **100%** of girls who completed worksheets attended feedback/assessment sessions on the second round of worksheets on their return to school.
- Girls reported that they found the worksheets helpful and that they supported learning.

“We used the worksheet questions to study, and this helped me answer many questions in Ministry [exams] more than the books.”

“The library was open sometime after the closure of schools due to COVID. In mornings and afternoons, we prepared [for national exams] by reading books and worksheets

Girls’ responses in External Evaluation interviews

Benefit 2: Engagement of teachers

There were many benefits in engaging project teachers to develop the worksheets rather than creating them centrally in a ‘top-down’ process. This process meant that the worksheets were:

- Contextually driven: Teachers had a close connection with the girls for whom they were developing the worksheets.

- At the right level: Teachers understood the level at which the girls were working and at what level they *should* be working.
- In alignment: Teachers understood the curriculum requirements, so worksheets supported to return to school and subsequent learning.

By allocating grade-specific subjects to grade-specific teachers, it was possible to develop 98 subject worksheets (49 worksheets per round) rapidly, ensuring that girls received three worksheets (maths, English and local language literacy) appropriate to their age level and region. In addition to this, teachers also benefitted.

“The worksheet has included questions from grade 7 and 8 which helped us for preparation for the regional exam

“As [the worksheet] was given immediately after school closure due to COVID-19, it has given me hope in my learning and even I didn’t forget the questions to try and do them

97.62% of girls want the teachers to use worksheets when they return to schools

Girls’ responses in Key Informant Interviews

and unintentional stereotyping within the questions.

Teachers remained engaged with the project during extended school closures. Developing the worksheets supported the teachers' continued professional development. For example, many teachers had not seen or worked with distance learning worksheets before, and now they were creating and marking them. In addition, the initial ‘edit’ and ‘quality check’ of the worksheets from the ChildHope-CHADET education specialists allowed the project to embed gender sensitivity further and ‘[gender-responsive pedagogy](#)’ in the professional development of the teachers by identifying and adjusting inappropriate phrasing

Benefit 3: Support for wellbeing

As a result of the school closures associated with the Ebola virus epidemic of 2013 to 2016, much research was carried out looking at the effects of the school closures on school children and, in particular, the [effects on girls and young women](#) and their mental health due to isolation, stigmatisation on the return to school and learning loss. However, much less research emerged on the effects of school closures on teachers, who were subjected to many of the same pressures associated with isolation faced by school children and additional pressures such as job losses and the associated loss of income.

General research on the effects of [isolation on adults](#) has identified [some effects](#) such as loss of hope, reduced self-worth and reduced mental wellbeing. It is sometimes easy to forget that teachers

“The teachers have [given] us worksheets and advise[d] us on psychosocial perspectives. It helped us in refreshing our mind and to start our schooling with a better wish and hope, to recover from the pandemic’s anxiety.”

Girls’ responses in Key Informant Interviews

will suffer the effects of isolation during school closures, especially in low-income countries where the possibility of online communication is reduced. The effects can be exaggerated when a person cannot keep up to date with what is happening due to a lack of access to TV or radio. Teachers' use to develop the worksheets may have had a secondary benefit of providing a level of psychosocial support. Teachers maintained a focus and connection with their work, thus maintaining purpose and hope. They maintained contact with the project, and by extension, with the girls, allowing them to be kept fully abreast of the

situation and ongoing changes – this being especially important for those teachers in the more remote areas.

Engaging teachers directly in the development of the worksheets had a demonstrably positive effect. When teachers were initially approached, they were keen to be involved. The project offered ‘coaching’ over the phone, where teachers articulated elevated levels of motivation. The levels of autonomy given to them, based on the knowledge of the curriculum, further embedded motivation, and feelings of empowerment.

Benefit 4: Sustainability

The sustainability of this intervention is not a straightforward proposition, as the intervention was necessarily dependant on the temporary school closures. However, the learning and benefits of the intervention indicate sustainability potential. The continued professional development of the teachers has enabled them to develop worksheets linked to the curriculum, which can be used to supplement and support their classroom activities. In addition, the willingness of the girls to engage with distance learning worksheets can support their learning outside of the classroom. The sustainability relies only on the leadership in schools to adopt distance learning worksheets into the school's teaching ethos and to be able to subsume the printing costs into the overall school budget.

Benefit 5: Value for Money

The only additional costs associated with developing and distributing the learning worksheets to

Cost associated with the first set of worksheets		
Printing	158,748 ETB	£3,239
Distribution	No cost	

Cost associated with the second set of worksheets		
Printing	148,022 ETB	£3,021
Distribution	No cost	

more than 12,000 girls were the printing costs. The distribution coincided with the planned distribution of health and hygiene materials, public health leaflets, and the one-off financial support payment. The total cost enabled approximately 74,000 worksheets to be developed, printed, and distributed, allowing the girls to continue their learning during an extended period of school closures.