

total of US\$635,000, in addition to US\$22,000 spent on rehabilitation costs. In addition, approximately 5,000 ABEC facilitators/teachers received training to enhance their instructional skills.

Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

In August 2016, the UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office contracted the Center for Evaluation and Development (C4ED) at the University of Mannheim as an independent evaluator to assess the ABE program in Ethiopia. The evaluation assessed whether ABECs contributed to the achievement of the ESDP V's objectives of providing access for out-of-school children, and in particular, for children from pastoralist communities. Furthermore, this report explores the specific role UNICEF has played in supporting ABECs and the extent of the impact, effectiveness, relevancy, efficiency, and sustainability of UNICEF's support. The main purpose of the report is to provide evidence for decision-making on how to support the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to improve the implementation of the ABE program.

This impact evaluation report reviews ABE in the regions of Afar, Oromia and Somali, and was conducted between October 2016 and October 2017. The evaluation addresses four specific objectives and seeks to answer the corresponding questions for each:

1. Assess the **impact** and **effectiveness** of ABE and ABECs:
 - To what extent has the provision of ABECs (specifically those supported by UNICEF) increased access to education for under-served populations, especially children from pastoralist communities?
 - How have ABECs increased the cognitive development of children in terms of basic skills in mathematics, reading, writing, computing, environmental sciences, and how have they enabled successful transition of students to formal education?
 - Are ABECs a flexible delivery method?
 - Do ABECs provide quality education?
2. Assess the **relevancy** of ABECs:
 - Are the modalities used to implement ABE and ABECs more relevant to the needs of children in pastoral communities, in comparison to formal primary education?
3. Assess the **efficiency** of ABECs:
 - Has the ABE program been implemented in the most efficient way to increase access to basic education?
4. Assess the **sustainability** of ABECs:
 - How did the ABE program encourage ABE-related activities within communities?
 - Do more empowered communities demand for more ABE services?

The **scope** of this evaluation encompasses the ABE program from 2010-2016 and focuses on three regions supported by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Ethiopia: Afar, Oromia and Somali. The intended main users of the evaluation findings are the UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office, the MoE, and other education specialists and stakeholders at national and local levels.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation applied a **mixed-method approach** including a large quantitative data collection, in-depth qualitative interviews, and structured analysis of secondary and administrative data. Given that ABE center locations were not assigned randomly and that no baseline data was collected prior to the beginning of the intervention, the impact evaluation design was based on **non-experimental methods**. This involved the selection of a group of control villages where no ABECs were established while using data from households, parents and *kebeles* (neighborhoods) to account for the initial differences between the villages with ABECs and those without ABECs. The impact was then assessed by comparing the performance of the children in ABEC villages to the ones in non-ABEC villages. The following methodologies were used:

1. Comparing villages with UNICEF-supported ABECs to those with other (government) ABECs.
2. Comparing villages with UNICEF-supported ABECs to those with formal primary schools.
3. Comparing villages with UNICEF-supported ABECs to those with no primary school education present.

In the main analysis, **multivariate regression models** were used to control for heterogeneous student backgrounds, such as different households, caregivers, and village characteristics. Throughout the evaluation process significant efforts were made to generate high-quality data and credible evidence while considering the time, budget, and prevailing circumstances in the field. Since the data collection was only carried out in three regions and in remote areas, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the whole country. Furthermore, due to the drought and emergency situations in the Somali region, findings from this region were limited to the Jijiga *woreda* (district) only.

Main findings and conclusion

Impact and Effectiveness

In remote settings of Ethiopia, the enrollment rates are much lower than in urban settings, putting the country far from reaching the goal of universal enrollment. This evaluation revealed that ABECs have helped increase enrollment rates in villages where no other primary school alternative was available, thereby improving the efforts towards universal enrollment. In the three regions evaluated, the average net enrollment rate for children between the ages of seven and 11 was 71 per cent in villages with ABECs, in comparison to an enrollment rate of 74 per cent in villages with primary schools, and 50 per cent in villages without any primary schooling facility. Regional effects showed larger enrollment rates in Afar (75 per cent) than in Oromia (66 per cent) and Somali (55 per cent). In terms of gender gaps, the Somali region had the largest disparities (45 per cent for girls versus 62 per cent for boys), followed by Oromia (60 per cent versus 66 per cent). In Afar, no gender gaps were identified.

In understanding why children are not attending school, especially in villages that have no primary education facility, more than half of the parents claimed the school is too far away (57 per cent). This answer was cited much less in villages with an ABEC (31 per cent) or those with a formal primary school (15 per cent). The main reason stated by parents for why children do not attend school was due to children's duties for household chores. This was stated by 67 per cent of parents in villages with primary schools and by 53 per cent of parents in villages with an ABEC. This is in line with the findings from in-depth interviews, where parents raised the need for child labor to contribute to economic and livelihood activities in pastoral communities.

"... The agricultural outputs are being mostly collected in the morning which clashes with the children's schooling since the children also help in the agriculture work. In this critical time, the committee [CMC] is able to rearrange the schedule and shift the school to the afternoon session after meeting with community"
(CMC member from Oromia Region interviewed during the evaluation).

The unbiased net effect of having an ABEC in the village can only be estimated using multivariate regression models to analyze heterogeneous student background. The results showed an average increase of 16 percentage points towards enrollment rates in villages with an ABEC in comparison to those having no primary facility. Given that only half of all children are attending primary school in villages without any schooling facilities, this highlights the importance of ABECs in bringing basic education to remote communities. Despite the positive enrollment effect, the transition from ABECs to the second cycle of primary education at formal primary schools remains low and gender-biased. Only 21 per cent of boys and 14 per cent of girls living in ABEC villages continue primary education after going to an ABEC. In comparison, 38 per cent of boys and 19 per cent of girls in villages with a formal primary school reach the second cycle of primary education. This impacts the margin of improvement the ABE program could have in terms of higher attendance rates in upper primary and secondary school.

In terms of cognitive development, the multivariate model showed that attending an ABEC significantly increases cognitive performance. Based on a mathematics test that categorized children in seven different levels (from innumeracy to highly skilled), attending an ABEC increased children's mathematics skills by approximately half a category in comparison to children that do not attend any primary school. Similar results were revealed when using the vocabulary test (number of words recognized) and literacy test (ability to read a simple text) which indicated that attending an ABEC improved the ability to recognize words (+3 words from an average of 11 words recognized) and decreased the probability of being illiterate by approximately seven percentage points. The impact remained larger for children who attend formal primary schools (+4 words in vocabulary, and reduction of 10 points in illiteracy rate), suggesting that, primary schools still performed better in terms of cognitive development. Overall, the learning outcomes were on a low base level with only 32-37 per cent of 10 to 11-year-old students from ABEC and primary schools having the ability to read at least one word from a standard level two school textbook.

When observing UNICEF-supported ABECs and other ABECs, no significant differences in terms of children's cognitive performance could be found. However, there were mixed

Interview with an ABE facilitator in Afar Region

How would you qualify the overall quality of ABE Centre construction?

Respondent: *Initially there was a problem of floor, roofs, doors windows, glasses, desk chairs, combined desk after one year it needs maintenances services. Therefore, the overall quality of the constructional materials are below standard.*

Do you think educational equipment is available in sufficient quantity in your ABE Centre?

Respondent: *Educational equipment such as exercise books for students were provided by UNICEF this year, a shelf is on the way to come. Generally, the quality of educational materials is ok, however, they are hardly sufficient. To your surprise, there are no sport materials perhaps even a ball. Comparatively, things are a little bit improved now than when it was ABEC.*

results identified regarding the impact of UNICEF's support to the ABEC environment and training of ABEC facilitators. UNICEF-supported ABECs were more likely to be new or in a very good condition (44 per cent versus 14 per cent), in a formal school building (73 per cent versus 61 per cent) and not outside under a tree (22.5 per cent versus 26 per cent) than other ABECs. Further, UNICEF-supported ABECs had more classrooms and a significantly lower student-teacher ratio than other ABECs (50 for UNICEF-supported ABECs versus 66 for other ABECs, and 43 for formal primary). Additionally, there was a higher incidence of water present for drinking and washing hands in UNICEF-supported schools. The same was true for toilet facilities and classroom equipment, such as proper seating and desks for the students. On the other hand, government ABECs had a higher textbook to student ratio as well as teachers that had more teaching experience and received a higher salary and formal teacher training.

In conclusion, the evidence gathered showed that UNICEF-supported ABECs have better infrastructure than non-UNICEF-supported ABECs, however, with teachers that have lower qualifications and less experience. This indicates a need to focus on improving the quality of the facilitators. It should be noted that all ABECs are run by the government and not by UNICEF, and that the lower teacher qualifications in UNICEF-supported regions can be explained by UNICEF's mission to reach the most vulnerable children in remote locations. These communities face greater challenges in attracting qualified teachers which has had a negative impact on learning outcomes.

Relevancy, Efficiency and Sustainability

An important objective of the evaluation was to understand the relevancy of ABE curriculum when considering the learning needs of the local communities. REB officials are responsible for contextualizing and translating curriculum into local languages and developing the necessary corresponding teaching materials. Efforts had been made to translate the curriculum into regional languages and to shorten the four-year curriculum into three years to adapt to the needs of local pastoralist communities. However, the analysis of the interviews revealed little coherency of a condensed ABE curriculum among Ethiopian stakeholders. The MoE had requested the adoption of formal primary school curriculum instead of the ABE-condensed curriculum. At the time when this evaluation was conducted, two different curricula existed at the local level: the condensed ABE curriculum and the formal primary school curriculum which is favored by the federal government and adopted by many ABE facilitators. Efforts to contextualize the curricula are still needed, together with the development of a distinct ABE curriculum that extends to the second cycle of primary school.

According to UNICEF and key stakeholders at regional and *woreda* levels, the insufficient priority given to ABE at regional and federal levels has constrained the sustainability and full quality delivery of ABE as a mainstream education modality for these marginalized communities. To achieve sustainability, it must be guaranteed that the authorities take over ownership and have the capacity to continue after UNICEF funding ends.

To support the quality of ABE, UNICEF's support was directed to the development of human capital at REB and *woreda* levels, with capacity building interventions in various thematic areas: mainstreaming of School Improvement Plan (SIP) principles; system training for the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and Geographic Information System (GIS); and improving formative and continuous assessments. However, the sustainability of these activities is undermined since there has been a high staff turnover that prevents sustainable skilled human resources and internal continuous professional development. Limitations regarding accountability and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system - as shared during interviews - were also key barriers towards achieving effective and sustainable ABE.

At the local level, interviews from beneficiaries and local officers revealed that ABE's main achievements in terms of sustainability could be observed in community mobilization efforts and the increased social demand for quality education. The Center Management Committees (CMCs), ABE facilitators and cluster supervisors participated in disseminating awareness-raising messages to the community. However, the capacity of CMCs to sustainably manage ABECs was limited due to the lack of local resources, as well as the low qualifications of and insufficient CMC trainings for ABE facilitators. Decisions taken at the community level remain unplanned and ad-hoc, namely, the choice of the location for ABECs, back-to-school campaigns, and monitoring of out-of-school children. Such actions were not sufficient to sustainably support the enhancement of the quality of education.

Interview with a parent in Somali Region

How important is education to your children?

Respondent: *It's important*

What do you think can education bring to your children?

Respondent: *Education is more important to our children. Because they learned how to read and write, there will also be some kind of opportunity that they'll teach us.*

Lastly, the budget modalities employed to finance ABE must be sustainable to ensure that the investments can achieve maximum outputs, outcomes and impacts. This evaluation focused on UNICEF's support to ABE, based on a review of UNICEF's Annual Work Plans in Afar, Oromia and Somali regions. The review showed an evolution of UNICEF's support away from construction and furnishing of ABECs, towards more soft components, such as training, capacity building, and awareness raising. This evolution was justified by the need to rationalize public spending, increase the ownership of national authorities for ABE, and concentrate resources on quality improvement in teacher capacity, school-upgrading, and expanding ABE for the upper cycle of primary school.

Recommendations

The evaluation provides several short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations addressed to the MoE, UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office and partners at national and local levels. The recommendations should be considered while engaging with all major stakeholders in ongoing efforts to improve ABE and bring quality education to rural pastoral communities.

Short-term Recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure long-term success and improve learning outcomes it is essential that the MoE takes over full ownership for ABE as a primary education modality. That involves the introduction of ABE methodologies into the revised and endorsed Pastoralist Education Strategy. 	MoE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts should be dedicated to strengthening the supervision and monitoring of ABECs. This includes conducting frequent supervisory support, increasing the financing of existing resource centers, and strengthening capacity building for cluster supervisors and <i>woreda</i> education officers. 	MoE & UNICEF Ethiopia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The performance accountability system should be reinforced with the development and regular use of professional performance assessment. Criteria and processes should be developed and approved by a committee at the federal level, including UNICEF and the REBs. 	MoE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve learning outcomes for ABE students, the National Learning Assessment test of Grade 4 learners from the formal primary school system should be extended to ABECs. This would also increase ownership by MoE for the ABE system. 	MoE
Medium-term Recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve primary school completion rates and the learning environment, the implementation of ESDP IV/V strategies for hard-to-reach children should continue. 	MoE, REB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended support to ABE facilitators must be prioritized via adequate teacher training on active teaching methods, professional assessment and supervision, and experience sharing among teachers. 	MoE, REB, UNICEF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context-specific incentives should be provided for the ABE facilitators. This can include, for example, the opportunity to be promoted to formal teachers. 	MoE, REB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The physical environment of the ABEC should be improved as per the ABE standards, making schools child-friendly in all aspects. 	MoE, REB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essential teaching and learning materials including teaching aids, reference books, and workbooks should be supplied to ABECs. 	MoE, REB

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts should be made to upgrade selected ABEC from lower primary (level 1-4) to upper primary (level 5-6), since many ABECs only offer the first four grades. Upgrading ABECs often brings learning closer to home, which enables pastoralist children to complete primary education easily and be prepared to start their secondary school learning. 	MoE, REB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small multi-grade approach teaching should be established so that more children have access to a primary school close to their home. 	MoE, REB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the assessment that some pastoralist communities still perform seasonal migration, there is a clear need to promote and provide mobile schools and institutionalize and scale up the Networking Card System in all pastoralist districts. This should include advocacy, planning, procurement, and training at the <i>woreda</i> and community levels. UNICEF is best placed to advocate for this at the federal and regional levels, with the support of local NGOs who can collect good practices and lessons learned at the local level. Training on the Learner Networking Card could be included as an additional module to the on-job facilitator training. It can also be given to the communities via cluster supervisors and <i>woreda</i> education officers in partnership with local NGOs. 	MoE, REB, UNICEF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualization of the ABE curriculum should continue. It should be based on the formal primary school curriculum together with the development of a distinct ABE curriculum extending to the second cycle of primary school. Contextualization should include local implementing partners, representatives of communities, and ABE teachers/facilitators. Local education research institutions should be included to add research evidence to demonstrate how a child and context-sensitive curriculum can be developed. 	MoE, REBs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF’s continued participation in the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) pooled funds is recommended, specifically in the support provided to improving the quality of ABE while maintaining capacity building activities at federal and local levels and supporting school upgrading. 	UNICEF
Long-term Recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reach universal school attendance in remote rural areas and pastoral communities, initiatives to increase attendance in ABEC / primary schools must be improved and expanded, and poverty must be addressed in a more holistic approach. 	MoE, REB, UNICEF