

School-Community Partnership Serving HIV-affected Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Primary Schools (SCOPSO) Project

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Executive Summary

Project Overview

In 2007, Ethiopia's Ministry of Health estimated that there were 5,459,139 orphans living in Ethiopia, of whom approximately 855,720 had lost a parent to AIDS. Close to 12% of primary school students were considered to be affected by HIV/AIDS. According to DHS/Ethiopia data from 2005, only 62.5% of 10-14 year olds lived with both parents. Children affected by HIV are more likely to experience chronic poverty, health problems, stigma and discrimination, food insecurity, or to drop out of school – all of which fuel and are fueled by HIV.

In response to this crisis, the government of Ethiopia has taken important measures including harmonizing national laws and policies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, drafting national plans of action to coordinate support for OVC, piloting Ethiopian Standards of Services for OVC and establishing a national OVC taskforce. Through PEPFAR and other initiatives, the U.S. government has joined these efforts by supporting a collaborative, multi-sectoral response to improve the overall wellbeing of the nation's most vulnerable children and mitigate the impact of HIV.

To this end, in August 2009 the U.S. Agency for International Development contracted World Learning to implement a project entitled, "School-Community Partnership Serving HIV-affected Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Primary Schools (SCOPSO)." The objectives of this nationwide project were to provide quality, comprehensive services to at least 40,000 OVC across all regions of Ethiopia with a focus on increased enrollment, retention, and academic performance and to strengthen school-community partnerships in 400 schools to improve their capacity to plan and manage OVC support. In recognition of the implicit relationship between child wellbeing and academic outcomes, the project's underlying theory of change was that if school-community groups are prepared to effectively plan and manage holistic care and support programs for vulnerable children, OVC will be more likely to enroll in school, attend classes regularly, and perform well academically.

In response to programmatic recommendations from World Learning, in November 2010 USAID modified the SCOPSO contract to increase the number of direct beneficiaries by 30% from 40,000 to 52,000; introduce individual and household level economic strengthening interventions to empower guardians to better provide for children's needs; integrate child social and financial education into the program design; and increase funding from \$8 million to \$10 million. Over the course of implementation, other contractual amendments extended the period of performance by 2 additional years for a total of five years and increased the budget to \$15,430,000. In addition to these USAID/PEPFAR funds, World Learning secured approximately \$350,000 in private funding from the Moneygram Foundation and other groups to expand the impact of the child social and financial education activity.

World Learning and its sub-contractor Tigray Development Association delivered holistic, comprehensive services to 52,000 OVC in five key areas: food and nutrition, shelter and care, educational support, psychosocial support, and economic strengthening. Originally, World Learning also planned to include a child protection component, but USAID instructed the project team to eliminate this component in response to an Ethiopian law placed restrictions on NGO activities related to human rights, including child rights. SCOPSO promoted the sustainability of this service delivery component by simultaneously building the capacity of schools to plan and manage OVC support activities independently. Key elements of SCOPSO's capacity building approach included establishing "school core groups" at each school which were responsible for identifying OVC, assessing and prioritizing their needs, and developing strategies to meet these needs. The project team provided training, technical assistance, and continuous mentoring to support these school groups. School core groups successfully mobilized communities to contribute cash and in-kind donations to support OVC education. Schools also raised their own funds to support OVC by developing microenterprises using seed money provided by SCOPSO through small school-incentive awards. These small businesses generate steady, sustainable income that is reinvested in support for OVC.

Achievements

The SCOPSO project resulted in the successful provision of quality, comprehensive services to more than 52,000 OVC as well as the enhanced capacity of 400 school-community groups to independently plan and manage OVC support programs. At the output level, the project achieved or exceeded virtually all of its targets, indicating that comprehensive services such as provision of school uniforms, stationery supplies, supplemental food, and counseling services were delivered as planned. At the outcome level, data from annual assessments show that by the end of the project period, beneficiaries were performing, on average, as well or better on final exams as their non-OVC peers. 88.5% of beneficiaries in grades 4-7 were promoted to the next grade, a remarkable achievement relative to Ethiopia's national drop-out rate of 16.1%. 95% of beneficiaries were enrolled and retained in school; 5% left school for a variety of reasons such as moving to a new area of the country.

There is considerable reason to expect that these achievements will be sustained in the future, even without SCOPSO funding. School core groups have become well-integrated into school structures, and members of these groups have the technical capacity to identify and assess OVC needs and develop coordinated care plans to meet these needs. 783 teachers have been trained as lay counselors and are well-equipped to help build children cope with emotional stress, establish relationships with peers and build self-esteem. Over a five year period, 400 schools successfully raised approximately \$600,000 in community donations for OVC and they are prepared to continue their successful community mobilization strategies. At the time of project closeout, close to 90% of school-led microenterprises reported generating steady income that they plan to use to purchase school supplies, uniforms, or supplemental food for OVC now that SCOPSO support has ended. OVC themselves are now better equipped to plan for the future, budget, and save resources. Through project sponsored Aflatoun savings clubs, approximately 43,000 children (51% beneficiaries) saved \$77,000 over a three year period and are excited to purchase exercise books for the next school year using this money. At the government level, school cluster supervisors have integrated OVC support into their regular monitoring tools,

ensuring that Woreda Education Offices are well positioned to hold schools accountable for ensuring that OVC have the support they need to succeed in school.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

SCOPSO encountered several major challenges over the course of the project period that influenced implementation. The large and growing number of orphans and vulnerable children in schools presented a significant challenge for project staff and members of school core groups. For example, in the 2013-2014 academic year, approximately 100,000 students enrolled in schools supported by SCOPSO were classified as OVC according to PEPFAR's definition, yet resource limitations meant that SCOPSO could only provide direct support to 52,000 children. As a result, even with clear selection criteria, teachers found it extremely difficult to select beneficiaries from among such a large group of vulnerable children.

High food insecurity linked with high rates of inflation in food prices presented a challenge because the number of beneficiaries requiring emergency nutritional support far exceeded project resources designated for this component. The project team responded to this challenge by redoubling its efforts at community mobilization and fundraising, and also by developing more robust economic strengthening interventions at the individual, household, and community levels.

High staff turnover is endemic within all levels of Ethiopia's education system. Teachers, cluster supervisors, and principals who had been trained to carry out important roles in the coordination of care and support for OVC often transferred to other schools or resigned from their jobs. SCOPSO staff mitigated this challenge by offering refresher training opportunities, as relevant, in order to preserve the continuity of children's care.

Recommendations

While SCOPSO made significant progress in meeting the needs of some of Ethiopia's most vulnerable children, the number of OVC requiring support continues to outstrip resources available to reduce their socioeconomic vulnerability. In light of this reality, the SCOPSO project generated some programmatic recommendations to guide future investments in school-based OVC support.

Key recommendations include integrating OVC inclusion strategies into school annual improvement plans, mitigating high turnover rates by sharing reviewing plans regularly with stakeholders, conducting an ex-post evaluation of the project, strengthening the evidence base by measuring learning outcomes, expanding support to secondary schools, and incorporating OVC inclusion strategies into other large, donor funded education projects regardless of their technical focus.

World Learning will continue to build upon the many successes of the SCOPSO project and make efforts to mobilize new resources for school-based OVC programming in Ethiopia in the hopes of ensuring that all children in Ethiopia have the opportunity to grow, learn, and fulfill their great potential.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CSFE	Child Social and Financial Education
CSI	Child Status Index
KETB	Kebele Education and Training Board
SCOPSO	School-Community Partnership Serving HIV-affected Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Primary Schools
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PEPFAR	U.S. President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RSEB	Regional State Education Bureau
SCG	School Core Group
SCOPSO	School-Community Partnership Serving HIV-affected Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Primary Schools
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WEO	Woreda Education Office

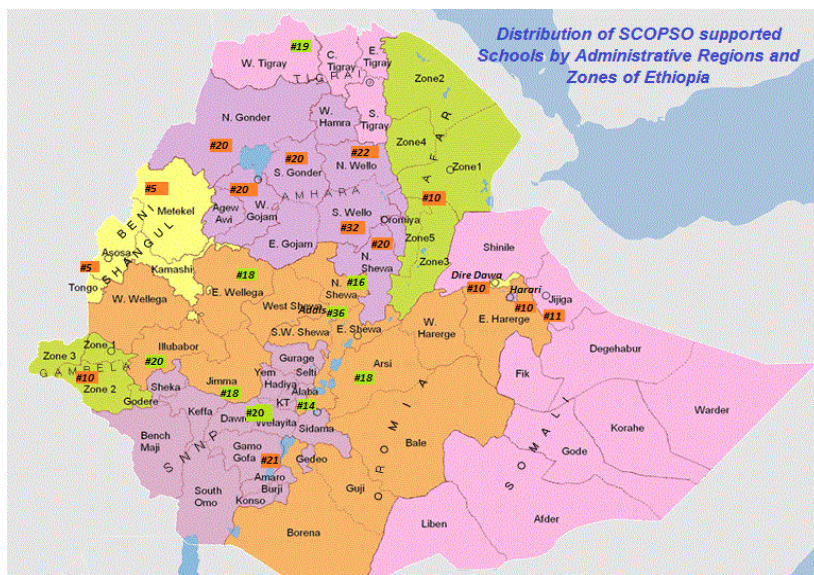
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview and Rationale

On August 15, 2009, the U.S. Agency for International Development awarded World Learning the project entitled, “School-Community Partnership Serving HIV/AIDS Affected Orphans and Vulnerable Children (SCOPSO) in Primary schools,” a contract funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) focused on building the capacity of school-community groups in Ethiopia to plan and manage care and support for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). World Learning engaged Tigray Development Association as a sub-contractor to implement all aspects of the program in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and also partnered with the Dutch NGO Aflatoun to implement the Child Social and Financial Education activities. The following report summarizes the activities implemented under the SCOPSO project, highlights key accomplishments and challenges, and provides recommendations for future replication and scale up.



SCOPSO was a nationwide project that operated in all regions of Ethiopia, including Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administrations from August 2009 through August 2014. In recognition of the implicit relationship between child wellbeing and academic outcomes, the project’s underlying theory of change was that if school-community groups are prepared to effectively plan and manage holistic care and support programs for vulnerable children, OVC will be more likely to enroll in school, attend classes regularly, and perform well academically.

Over the course of five years, SCOPSO achieved the following results:

- Provision of quality, comprehensive services to at least 52,000 HIV affected or infected OVC, with a focus on increased enrolment, retention, and academic performance
- Strengthened School-Community partnership in 400 primary schools to enhance their capacity to plan and manage OVC support programs

In order to achieve these results, SCOPSO staff selected 400 intervention schools in close consultation with the Regional State Education Bureaus (RSEB) and the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administrations using criteria established by the project team. Selection criteria for individual beneficiaries were based on PEPFAR’s OVC definition.

OVC affected by HIV are more likely to experience chronic poverty, health problems, stigma and discrimination, food insecurity and to drop out of school. Extended family networks play an important role in mitigating the challenges faced by OVC, but resources are often stretched too thin to meet children's needs. For these reasons, the activity was integrated into the education sector response to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on child wellbeing and on educational outcomes.

HIV affects children in a variety of ways, and interferes not only with their education but also with their overall health, including their emotional and physical wellbeing. The impact of HIV/AIDS also challenges the educational system itself at all levels. AIDS erodes the demand for education by increasing the number of orphans without support and by decreasing family budgets for school fees.

According to a single point estimate from 2007, there were 804,184 children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia¹. Presently, close to 17 million primary school children attend nearly 30,000 primary schools across the country². Based on the annual updates of OVC prevalence recent assessments, orphans and vulnerable children constitute more than 12% of the total population of students in primary schools.

While access to quality education can significantly reduce children's risk of contracting HIV, schools also have the potential to provide a safe environment and the often-missing adult guidance and supervision for children already affected by HIV/AIDS. Since schools are available in most communities, the SCOPSO project was designed to utilize them as hubs through which communities can be mobilized to address the multitude of unmet needs of orphans and vulnerable children.

Importantly, the objectives of the SCOPSO project support the broader goals of the government of Ethiopia's National Taskforce for OVC, the National HIV/AIDS and OVC Policy, the Education Sector Policy and they align closely with PEPFAR and U.S. mission priorities as well as the goals outlined in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS.

1.2 Implementation Strategies

Engaging schools as focal points for OVC care and support: School represents the one place where large numbers of children gather virtually daily. With the exception of a child's primary caregiver, a teacher may be the most consistent adult presence in a child's life. For this reason, as well as other intrinsic benefits of education, schools and teachers offer an ideal mechanism for providing care and support to OVC. Schools link OVC and their families with the resources and services available to them within their own communities. However, in order for this mechanism to be successful, schools must be reorganized to provide the care and support necessary to enroll and retain OVC and provide education that best meets their needs.

A core part of the SCOPSO strategy was establishing and engaging school-community groups known as school core groups (SCG) which were made up of sub-working groups focused on various technical areas. The SCGs were comprised of teachers, PTA members, Kebele Education and Training Board representatives, as well as OVC themselves in all aspects of activity design, planning, and

¹ Federal HIV Prevention and Control Office of Ethiopia, 2007

² Ministry of Education statistics, 2012-2013

implementation. Qualitative data gathered from school personnel highlight the status of schools prior to the SCOPSO intervention – although some schools were providing services to OVC on an ad hoc basis, these efforts were neither systematized nor consistently implemented. SCOPSO enabled schools to develop mechanisms to re-enroll OVC who had dropped out, retain OVC in school, and track OVC wellbeing and academic performance. It has resulted in new ways to identify and monitor OVC student attendance and academic performance, which is paramount for providing support. SCOPSO also raised awareness among teachers about how many of their students are OVC and the unique challenges that these children face. Finally, SCOPSO introduced a care provision strategy in core areas of holistic support for OVC including educational support, psychosocial support, health care, food, shelter, and economic strengthening interventions for OVC and their guardians.

Building School capacity to plan and manage OVC care and support: Comprehensive human and institutional capacity development is necessary to ensure the long term sustainability of the interventions implemented through SCOPSO. The SCOPSO initiative has demonstrated that by raising awareness of the challenges faced by OVC among school communities, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to provide care and support for OVC, and by assisting them to establish school-based systems, the goal of sustained care and support can be realized.

To this end, project staff, school core group members and community leaders conducted a series of community mobilization initiatives designed to identify the needs of OVC and outline strategies to address those needs. Technical support and ongoing mentoring for SCG members was critical and complemented training sessions and workshops. These workshops also served as powerful incentives and morale boosters for teachers who joined SCGs on a voluntary basis in addition to their regular teaching duties.

SCOPSO's approach to capacity building was multi-faceted. At its inception, the team oriented regional, zonal and woreda level stakeholders to familiarize them with the objectives and strategies of the project. At the school level, SCOPSO provided training for PTA leaders, school principals and community representatives focused on the management of OVC care and support. The project team also led short-term, multi-site training sessions for care coordinators on psychosocial support, life skills education, economic strengthening, financial management for school-based enterprises, and child social and financial education curricula. Project staff held refresher training, as necessary, to address implementation challenges. After four years of close collaboration with cluster school supervisors, SCOPSO trained them to monitor and track OVC enrollment, wellbeing, and academic progress as part of the project's exit strategy and sustainability plan. Project officers and technical staff provided tailored and ongoing technical assistance to each SCG on a monthly basis specific to their implementation challenges.

Provision of holistic Support in five core areas: SCOPSO provided comprehensive, holistic support to children in 5 core areas: food and nutrition, shelter and care, health care, psychosocial support, and educational support. In addition, SCOPSO provided economic strengthening services to reduce the socioeconomic vulnerability of OVC households.

Direct transfer of funds to schools for OVC care and support: SCOPSO-supported schools were required to identify OVC based on the PEPFAR OVC definition, assess and prioritize their needs, and develop and submit plan for support. Upon review and approval of these yearly plans, SCOPSO transferred funds on an annual basis to school bank accounts to be used to provide support for OVC through the implementation of the approved plans. To ensure sound financial stewardship and accountability, each financial transaction required the signatures of three designated signatories, who were typically PTA members. These funds were used to provide direct support for OVC through the provision of meals, school uniforms, stationery supplies, medical treatment, and the delivery of other critical services. In addition, funds supported the development of school-managed microenterprises that generated income that was also used to support OVC and help them to succeed academically. Typical examples of school-based microenterprises included renting small shops, animal fattening, and school gardens.

Establishment of OVC Support centers at schools for coordinated care: Through SCOPSO, 400 schools established OVC support centers which served as enclosed rooms where care coordinators could meet privately with children without interruption to assess their needs, plan for support, hold individual and group counseling sessions, and refer children for additional services, as relevant. SCOPSO equipped each of these centers with a desk, chairs, locking file cabinets, client register books, and other resources to support the documentation of these confidential consultations. The centers served as safe spaces for children to talk with their care providers and openly discuss their needs. SCOPSO introduced a system to track each child's unique situation and their academic standing, which facilitated efforts to develop individualized care plans and make referrals, when necessary.

Economic strengthening at the household level: Households in resource poor communities are often forced to continually weigh the long-term benefits of education against the immediate needs of their families. As a result, children belonging to families with limited livelihood options frequently have no choice but to engage in paid or unpaid work rather than attend school, in order to help meet the needs of their family. This is even more likely to be true for children who are not living with their parents.

SCOPSO addressed this challenge through economic strengthening schemes including village saving and loan associations (VSLA), which encourage the practice of saving regularly and reduces the expenses associated with borrowing by creating access to working capital. The overall goal of the household economic strengthening support was to ensure the long-term sustainability of OVC care by reducing economic vulnerability at the household level. Within the SCOPSO project, VSLA members were a self-selected group of parents and guardians of SCOPSO beneficiaries with some level of microenterprise experience. Participants engaged in a skills development process designed to teach them how to select, plan, and manage a microenterprise, and to ensure that market assessment and enterprise viability were part of the planning process. VSLA members committed to saving a fixed amount of money each week. Members are eligible to borrow from the pool of savings if they repay the money with a service charge. At the end of each year, the total savings and revenue from collected service charges are distributed to the members of the association. In areas where the VSLA approach was not feasible, SCOPSO transferred productive assets directly to OVC beneficiaries or their guardians.

Building partnerships with stakeholders: Much of SCOPSO’s success can be attributed to its strong partnerships with important stakeholders. From its inception, the SCOPSO program placed great emphasis on building and nurturing relationships with entities including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and Development, Regional State Education Bureaus, Woreda Education Offices, Kebele Administrations and, of course, the 400 primary schools which served as focal points for service provision.

The Basic Education Technical Working Group composed of representatives from USAID, other implementing partners and the government of Ethiopia served as an important forum for sharing ideas, reporting progress, and discussing responses to challenges. Regional State Education Bureaus were responsible for reviewing and endorsing annual implementation plans, which ensured regional government support for SCOPSO interventions. Woreda Education Offices were actively engaged in monitoring implementation at the school level by assigning cluster school supervisors to track progress. Schools assumed tremendous responsibility for establishing school core groups, mobilizing local communities to support OVC, linking beneficiaries with community groups, designing strategies to generate income to support OVC, and many other day to day tasks that ultimately ensured the success of the project.

Mobilizing communities to provide support for OVC: As part of its strategy to sustain OVC care and support activities and to develop a sense of ownership within communities, SCOPSO helped to raise community awareness about the challenges faced by OVC and engaged schools, local NGOs, health institutions, and government administrations in meaningful ways to design and implement innovative approaches for improving the wellbeing academic success of vulnerable children.

Since children are most likely to benefit from existing resources in their own communities, SCOPSO supported school core groups to identify and map potential stakeholders and service providers in their communities. These mapping exercises resulted in the establishment of linkages, referral systems, and a comprehensive list of individuals and community groups who could join efforts to support OVC to succeed in school.

2. PROJECT MONITORING AND EVALUATION

2.1 Project Monitoring

The project team used the SCOPSO results framework and performance monitoring plan as management tools to ensure the timely and reliable collection and analysis of performance data. These tools outline the development hypothesis implicit in World Learning’s approach to achieving results, as well as the causal relationships between project activities, outputs, and outcomes. The team collected data on essential PEPFAR indicators for OVC programs as well as project-specific indicators, and reported regularly to USAID, the Ministry of Education, and the Regional State Education Bureaus on implementation progress.

The SCOPSO team engaged teachers and other school core group members as its primary data collectors. This approach was simultaneously cost effective and also lay the critical foundation for school personnel

to take ownership of monitoring the wellbeing and academic progress of vulnerable students. The project team also engaged OVC representatives within school core groups in key aspects of monitoring SCOPSO's progress, such as assessing their own needs and tracking the provision of services. OVC care coordinators were responsible for overseeing the recording of OVC services into register books immediately upon providing a service. On a monthly basis, project officers reviewed accuracy by cross checking data from monthly reports with data from service register books sent the reports to area offices for entry into the project database. Using these databases, area coordinators and program assistants generated quarterly reports which they submitted to World Learning's office in Addis Ababa for compilation, analysis, and reporting.

On a monthly basis, regionally based staff provided technical assistance to school core group members to provide guidance on data collection practices, identify possible data quality concerns, and develop solutions jointly with school personnel to improve the quality of documentation. Using a standardized monitoring checklist developed by the project's M&E team, technical staff based in Addis Ababa verified that support had been provided to the students as reported.

2.2 Baseline Study: Summary of Findings

Prior to the commencement of interventions, the project team conducted a baseline study which examined factors affecting OVC education that were targeted for change within the SCOPSO results framework. These factors included access to psychosocial, academic/tutorial, and health care support services, as well as food security issues, children's experience with stigma and discrimination, and correct knowledge about HIV and AIDS.

The overall goal of this study was to gather baseline data to inform program implementation and management, as well as to provide critical stakeholder information to support the ongoing development of school-based programs designed to support orphans and vulnerable children in Ethiopia.

The study team used a stratified sampling approach including 4,433 OVC selected from each of the 400 schools supported by the SCOPSO project. 86% of respondents were direct beneficiaries. Within each school, 10 children were randomly selected from each grade, but taking gender into account to ensure balance.

This "snapshot" of child wellbeing prior to the delivery of services through SCOPSO provided important information about children's concerns as well as the most significant barriers to accessing education. Key results from the study are summarized as follows:

Children's Concerns and Wellbeing: A considerable proportion of the children (84%) stated that they have frequent anxieties and shared their most common worries. The children were asked about their fears through open ended-questions (no categories were suggested to them), and the most commonly reported concerns were about their schooling (57.3%), followed by clothing/shelter (48.5%) and food (47.5%). About a third (28%) of the children reported having less than one or no meal a day, during at least one day of the week prior to the survey. Of these children, 2% reported one or no meal during every day of that week. In addition, 8.7% of the children listed problems that affect their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Barriers to Education: About a third (30%) of the children reported having dropped out of school at some point. About half (51%) of the reasons for the extended absences had to do with lack of support at home, 40% were financial problems, and 38% were due hunger. Majority of the children (83.7%) reported having work-related duties after school, and about half of them (52%) felt that these responsibilities interfered negatively with their education.

Access to Educational and Health Support Services: While more than half (57.3%) of children shared concerns about schooling and education, less than half (48.8%) reported having actual access to tutorial or educational support. 48% of the surveyed children reported experiences when they were unable to receive medical care when they required it. In most cases (77.3%), the barriers to access were financial; 9% of the children reported unwillingness on the part of their guardian to take them to the clinic, while 5% had no clinic available in their community.

Psychosocial Support Services: About half (52%) of the children expressed having someone at school to go to for support. Of these, vast majority (87%) sought support from the teachers, while the remaining children felt more comfortable relying on fellow students for support they need.

HIV/AIDS Knowledge and Perception of Stigma and Discrimination: Lack of knowledge about how HIV is spread results in fear that fuels problems such as stigma and discrimination; these are often one of the barriers to education. 30% of the children perceived some sort of inequity in the manner in which they are treated, most often at their school, classroom, community and home. 45% of those children who reported discrimination at school identified their teachers as the perpetrators. Approximately three percent (2.9%) of the children aged 10 and above can be considered to have comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS. This means that they were able to correctly identify modes of transmission, means of prevention and reject most common misconceptions surrounding HIV and AIDS. Correspondingly, only about 4% of the children younger than 10 years of age correctly rejected common misconceptions related to HIV transmission and stigma. Noticeable differences were observed among respondents in different regions. Regions with particularly low knowledge level include Afar, Harari and Somali. Above 3% knowledge level was recorded among respondents from Diredawa (5%), Oromia (4.5%), and SNNPR (3.8%).

2.3 Child Status Index (CSI) Assessments

The Child Status Index (CSI), developed by Measure Evaluation with funding from USAID/PEPFAR, provides a framework for identifying the needs of orphans and other vulnerable children affected by HIV. Designed for use in low literacy settings, CSI is an easy-to-use tool that enabled teachers trained by SCOPSO staff to quickly and systematically assess children's wellbeing in five critical domains: nutrition, shelter/care, health, psychosocial, and education/skills.³ Through direct observation, teachers responsible for the coordination of services at school rated the wellbeing of SCOPSO beneficiaries in each domain using a rating scale of 1 to 4. For example, a rating of 4 in the nutrition domain would indicate that a child is well-fed, eats regularly and is growing well. A rating of 3 would mean that a

³ SCOPSO modified the CSI tool by eliminating the child protection domain in order to comply with Ethiopian law (CSA proclamation 621).

child has enough to eat some of the time, depending on season or food supply and that he or she has less energy than other children. A rating of 2 would mean that a child frequently complains of hunger and is lower weight and height than other children of the same age. A rating of 1 means a child rarely has food, goes to bed hungry most nights, and is wasted, stunted, and malnourished.

The CSI served as an important monitoring tool for project staff, who used data from these assessments to triangulate information gathered through other means. SCOPSO conducted eight CSI assessments over the course of project implementation, and relied on these data to plan, implement, and modify children’s services over time. In total, 61,463 OVC participated in these assessments. The project team used a cohort study approach to select a sample of 20 beneficiaries from each school to be assessed using CSI with the goal of monitoring the status of the same cohort of children for three consecutive years. However, when USAID extended the project for two additional years, approximately 20% of the cohort was replaced with different children because some had already graduated from primary school.

Table 1 below summarizes the results from five CSI assessments and shows substantial improvement in child wellbeing over time, as observed by the children’s teachers using the CSI tool. In the food and nutrition domain, only 46.8% of the children assessed in June of 2010 were given the higher ratings of 3 or 4 by their teachers. But by June 2014, almost 88% were considered to be either well-fed or to have enough food some of the time. Similarly, in June of 2010 only 50% of the cohort rated high in the shelter/care domain, but by June of 2014 almost 88% were given a rating of 3 or 4, representing an increase of 37%. The same trends emerge across all five CSI domains suggesting that overall child wellbeing improved markedly over time, and indicating substantial progress towards the achievement of SCOPSO project objectives, especially outcomes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.6.

Table 1: Child Status Index Summary of Results

Domains of Assessment	June 2010	March 2011	March 2012	December 2013	June 2014	Change
	% of OVC rated 3 or 4	% of OVC Rated 3 or 4	% of OVC Rated 3 or 4	% of OVC Rated 3 or 4	% of OVC Rated 3 or 4	
FOOD AND NUTRITION	46.8	64.6	76.4	81	87.9	41% Increase
SHELTER AND CARE	50	64.5	77	81.9	87.4	37% Increase
HEALTH	44.6	66.8	79.6	83.6	88	43% Increase
PSYCHOSOCIAL	63.7	78.2	86.1	88.5	91.4	28% Increase
EDUCATION AND SKILLS	59.2	73.5	82.4	84.2	88.2	29% Increase

2.4 Accomplishments Relative to Targets

In close consultation with USAID, the SCOPSO project team established targets informed by baseline figures in order to measure how well the project met its objectives. Analysis of project accomplishments relative to established targets demonstrates success across indicators at both the output and outcome levels. The project met or exceeded targets for 5 of 7 outcome level indicators. Performance for the indicator measuring promotion rates was 91%. Though it fell slightly short of the target, the achieved promotion rate of 88.5% for SCOPSO beneficiaries is remarkably high when compared to the overall national dropout rate of 16.1% for primary school students in grades 4-7 in 2012-2013. Similarly, performance for the indicator measuring changes in correct and comprehensive knowledge about HIV among beneficiaries was below expectation (77%), yet the change in knowledge levels represents a significant increase of 20.2 percentage points from baseline. At the output level, the project performance was above 95% for all indicators and frequently exceeded 100%. Table 2 below describes project performance for all indicators and also provides explanations in cases of over or underachievement.

Table 2: SCOPSO Achievements Relative to Established Targets

Level of Indicator	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Project Achievement	Performance	Explanation for Under or Over Achievement
Result 1: Provision of quality, comprehensive services to at least 52,000 HIV-affected or infected OVC, with a focus on increased enrollment, retention, and academic performance ⁴						
Outcome 1.1: OVC are enrolled, regularly attend school, and complete a minimum of primary school						
Outcome indicator	Deviation between mean scores of OVC and Non-OVC in all subjects on National exams	3.04	0	1.154	Target met	Data show that project beneficiaries are performing slightly better on final exams than their non-OVC peers. However, this difference is not statistically significant.
Outcome Indicator	% of OVC in grades 4-7 promoted to the next grade by end of academic year	91	97	88.5	91%	The baseline value of 91% was based on a sample of only 4,900 children and may not be representative. Although the target was not met, the achieved promotion rate of 88.5% is high relative to the national dropout rate of 16.1% in 20112-2013
Output indicator	# of schools that conducted OVC enrollment campaigns	0	400	397 ⁵	100%	
Output indicator	# of OVC enrolled and retained in school	0	52,000	49,400	95%	5% of beneficiaries left school for various unknown reasons which could include transferring to a new school or moving to a new area. Leaving school does not equate to dropping out.
Outcome 1.2: OVC develop strengths and skills to become self-confident, happy, hopeful, and able to cope with challenges						
Outcome indicator	% of OVC reporting that they discussed education issues with care givers more than 6 times in a year	64	95	95.8	100%	
Output indicator	# of psychosocial support centers established	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of OVC who received psychosocial support services	0	52,000	52,000	100%	

⁴ Through the SCOPSO contract, USAID initially contracted World Learning to provide comprehensive care and support services to 40,000 OVC and all targets for indicators were established with this number in mind. However, in November 2010 the number of targeted beneficiaries increased by 12,000 such that the total number of beneficiaries became 52,000.

⁵ Initially, SCOPSO supported 400 schools. However, the total number of schools decreased by three because one school became a secondary school and two others merged with nearby schools. By the 4th year of implementation, the total number of schools was 397, rather than 400.

Level of Indicator	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Project Achievement	Performance	Explanation for Under or Over Achievement
Output indicator	# of teachers trained to provide life skills education	N/A	800	783	97.9%	Target was not reached because a few schools had life skills education programs that predated SCOPSO. The project did not invest in training teachers in these schools.
Output indicator	# of Schools with a life skills education program	N/A	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of OVC participating in life skills education	N/A	26,000	35,360	136%	Target was exceeded because of high demand for life skills education from children
Outcome 1.3: OVC have enough food to eat regularly and maintain a healthy and active lifestyle						
Outcome indicator	% of OVC who report less than two meals a day during the week before the survey	34	15	18.2	83%	Reduction of 15.8 percentage points
Output indicator	# of OVC who have received food and nutrition support	N/A	5,200	6,539	126%	Target exceeded because schools often used revenue from school-based microenterprises to purchase food for children. This supplemented direct support from the project's emergency nutrition funds.
Outcome 1.4: OVC have access to adequate health services, HIV prevention programs, care and treatment						
Outcome indicator	% of OVC who sought but did not receive medical treatment the last time they were sick during the year	48	10	18.4	184%	Achievement represents a reduction by 29.6 percentage points
Outcome indicator	% of OVC with correct and comprehensive knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention	3	30	23.2	77%	Achievement represents an increase of 20.2 percentage points
Output indicator	# of schools that have established OVC health care programs	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of OVC who received health services	0	52,000	52,000	100%	
Output indicator	# of successful OVC referrals to local service providers	0	3,500	5,025	144%	Target was exceeded due to strong efforts at networking.
Outcome 1.5 : OVC receive legal information and have access to legal and protection services						

Level of Indicator	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Project Achievement	Performance	Explanation for Under or Over Achievement
Due to legal constraints imposed by the Government of Ethiopia's Charities and Societies Agency through Proclamation 621, USAID instructed World Learning not to implement the child protection component of SCOPSO						
Outcome 1.6 : OVC have safe and stable homes						
Outcome indicator	% of OVC who receive care from a responsible adult	74	90	93	103%	
Output indicator	# of OVC who received shelter and care services	0	13,000	28,055	216%	This target was exceeded largely because shelter and care services include the provision of underwear to female beneficiaries, which overstates the accomplishment.
Outcome 1.7 : Households caring for OVC have sufficient financial resources to meet their basic needs						
Output indicator	# of OVC who received educational materials and supplies	N/A	40,000	52,000	130%	This target was exceeded because the total number of beneficiaries increased in November 2010
Output indicator	# of school based income generation programs successfully generating income	N/A	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of OVC benefiting from the school based income generation activities	0	13,000	25,475	196%	Target exceeded because microenterprises were more profitable, on average, than initially expected
Output indicator	# of guardians/older OVC who benefited from household level economic strengthening activities	0	No target set	22,143	N/A	This includes VSLA and asset transfer activities
Output indicator	# of child social and financial education clubs formed	0	400	2,662	665.5%	In response to high demand from schools, World Learning secured supplemental private funding to expand the reach of the child social and financial education activity.
Output indicator	# of Village Savings and Loan Associations established	0	No target set	214	N/A	
Result 2: Strengthen school-community partnership in 400 schools to enhance their capacity to plan and manage OVC support programs						
Outcome 2.1: The needs of OVC are assessed and addressed in a coordinated way.						

Level of Indicator	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Project Achievement	Performance	Explanation for Under or Over Achievement
Output indicator	Number of schools with individual care plans for selected OVC	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of action plans developed and submitted to World Learning by school core groups	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of community service maps developed	0	400	397	100%	
Outcome 2.2: School core groups effectively plan , implement, and monitor program activities						
Output indicator	# of school core groups with at least six active technical working groups	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of schools that conducted enrollment campaigns	0	400	397	100%	
Output indicator	# of school-based income generation programs to support OVC established and functional	0	400	397	100%	89% of schools report regular, recurring revenue from microenterprises; 11% report seasonal income
Outcome 2.3: Project management and monitoring systems put in place for quality service delivery						
Output indicator	# of cluster supervisors who have incorporated OVC issues into monitoring checklists	0	N/A	402	N/A	
Output indicator	# of schools with up-to-date OVC records	0	400	397		

2.5 Final Evaluation

In January 2013 USAID/Ethiopia contracted the Ethiopian firm PRIN International to conduct a final performance evaluation of the SCOPSO project. The purpose of the evaluation was to obtain an unbiased, independent viewpoint on the overall performance of the project and to better understand the aspects of the project design that worked well, and those aspects that did not work well. The evaluation was expected to answer the following research questions:

1. How effective was the project in achieving its set objectives and anticipated results?
2. How is the project's approach and methodology designed to achieve the project objective and results?
3. What are the levels of satisfaction of the Ministry of Education, Regional Education Bureaus, Woreda Education Offices, schools, communities and beneficiary OVCs and their parents/guardians with the project? Why?
4. What are the lessons learned from the project? What challenges were encountered and what measures were taken to overcome these challenges?

PRIN International conducted this qualitative study in June and July of 2013 in 41 SCOPSO schools and 6 non-intervention "control" schools in 5 regions and one city administration using a purposive method for sample selection. The study team conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 1,005 people drawn from various stakeholder groups including OVC, guardians, teachers, PTA members, KETB representatives, and representatives from WEOs and RSEBs.

This external evaluation found that the SCOPSO project had achieved its objectives. In particular, the study team found that provision of educational materials and food were the two most significant interventions from the perspective of key stakeholders leading to improved enrollment and attendance for OVC. The evaluation reports very high levels of satisfaction among a wide range of stakeholders, especially education officials working at all levels of Ethiopia's decentralized system. The study team also observed firm commitment to project goals within communities, deeply rooted sense of ownership for project interventions, and a pervading spirit of volunteerism among teachers and community members which the evaluation attributed to SCOPSO interventions. The final evaluation also provided several recommendations for future programming; these are synthesized and discussed in the section of this report titled, Conclusions and Recommendations.

3. PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

3.1 Result 1: Provision of Quality, Comprehensive Services to at least 52,000 OVC

This section summarizes achievements within each core service area: educational support, psychosocial support, healthcare, food and nutrition, shelter and care, as well as economic strengthening.

Educational Support

Orphans and vulnerable children are at particularly high risk of poor academic performance, failing to attend class regularly, or dropping out of primary school. OVC have difficulty accessing school for a variety of reasons including significant responsibilities at home, hunger, inability to pay school fees, discrimination, and lack of family support. OVC, especially girls, typically must work to supplement family income or care for sick family members. Teachers find it challenging to support OVC learning because these children often arrive late, miss classes, have no time to complete homework assignments in the evenings, have difficulty focusing, exhibit disruptive behavior, and appear to lack motivation. Their lack of adult guidance and support at home compounds all of these problems. SCOPSO's educational support component aimed to reduce the most common barriers to educational access by providing OVC with school uniforms, stationery materials, and advocating for schools to waive school fees for OVC. Working through the school core group structure, SCOPSO also conducted enrollment campaigns, supported OVC to attend tutorial sessions, and raised awareness within communities of the importance of sending all children to school. The overarching goal of these activities was to improve OVC enrollment, retention, and academic performance.

Enrollment campaigns: Each year prior to the start of the school year, the Ministry of education sponsors community events across the nation aimed at encouraging parents to register their children for school. The project team leveraged these opportunities to familiarize communities with the SCOPSO program so that guardians of OVC would know that support was available. These events allowed school core group members to identify and re-enroll children who had dropped out of school.

Provision of school supplies: OVC often drop out of school because they cannot afford to purchase school supplies. Without exercise books, pencils, pens and erasers, children are unable to complete their classwork and they are often teased by their peers. SCOPSO eliminated this barrier to education by purchasing and distributing school supplies each year for project beneficiaries.



Waiving school fees: Although basic education is supposedly free in Ethiopia, in reality parents are expected to pay registration fees, school development fees, and fees associated with examinations. OVC are often compelled to drop out of school because they are unable to pay these fees. Through the SCOPSO project, school core groups advocated for OVC to be exempt from these payments which played a significant role in enabling these vulnerable children to remain in school.

Provision of school uniforms⁶: Most schools in Ethiopia require students to wear uniforms. In most schools, students who arrive without a uniform are not permitted to enter the school gates. Children whose families cannot afford uniforms are therefore not able to go to school. SCOPSO addressed this barrier by transferring funds to school bank accounts, which school core groups then used to purchase uniforms for SCOPSO beneficiaries. SCOPSO staff provided technical assistance, as needed, with the procurement process. Each year, SCOPSO beneficiaries received a school uniform which allowed them to attend school without any feelings of inferiority.



In schools that do not require uniforms, SCOPSO provided funding for casual clothing for OVC.

School uniforms are commonly used in most primary schools in Ethiopia. In areas where, the requirement of imposing uniforms becomes a barrier for all children, schools have decided not to require uniforms for all their students. In schools where wearing uniforms is a requirement and that OVC households can afford, SCOPSO provided school uniforms for all targeted children for the last five years. These helped children to attend school without any discrimination and feelings of inferiority in the school compound. In schools where there is no uniform requirement, SCOPSO provided financial support for casual clothing.

Ensuring access to tutorial services: Most schools offer after-school tutorials for students who need extra help or are falling behind in their coursework. Unfortunately, many OVC are unable to attend these sessions because they are expected to work after school. School core group members supported OVC to attend tutorials by talking with children's guardians about the importance of prioritizing school work. These efforts resulted in 37,854 OVC attending regular tutorial sessions.

Creating awareness of PTAs, KETBs, teachers, Idir and religious leaders on OVC education: These groups of people are important in convincing community members to send their children to school. SCOPSO has created awareness on the importance of education for OVC as tool to achieve full potential and growth. This enabled OVC to get registered in schools and complete their education.

Through SCOPSO, all 52,000 beneficiaries received at least one of services categorized under the educational component, and 49,400 were retained in school. 5% of beneficiaries left school for unknown reasons, which could include moving to a new area. 88.5% of beneficiaries in grades 4-7 were promoted at the end of the academic year, which is high in comparison to the national

⁶ In year 5, 1 school in Gambela did not receive funds for school uniforms due to conflict in the area.

dropout rate of 16.1% in 2012-2013.⁷ Data from annual surveys indicated that on average, SCOPSO beneficiaries performed as well or better than their non-OVC peers on final exams.

Psychosocial Support

Research has shown that children who have experienced stress or trauma due to the loss of a parent or other crises are resilient, meaning that they possess the capacity to fully recover psychologically and socially if their basic needs, including their psychosocial needs are met. However, children's psychosocial needs are often overlooked because they tend to be less apparent than more tangible needs such as the need for shelter, clothing, or food. In order to cope with life's challenges, children need physical stimulation and play, a sense of belonging to a family or community, appropriate relationships with other young people, personal attachments with caring adults, a sense of control over their lives, and a space in which they can safely express emotions such as grief, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, anger, or confusion.

OVC in Ethiopia and around the world typically lack the supportive home environments that promote healthy psychosocial wellbeing. In recognition of this reality, SCOPSO equipped teachers with the knowledge and skills to recognize psychosocial stress in children, and to provide ongoing support to help OVC to gain hope, self-confidence, and skills to cope with challenges and succeed academically. Under SCOPSO, psychosocial support included three main sub-components: provision of individual and group counseling, provision of life skills education, and the creation of opportunities for OVC to engage in recreational activities with their peers. Play-based activities are essential for helping children to form trusting relationships with other young people, and they also help to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV.

The project team began by establishing psychosocial support centers within schools where teachers and children could talk privately about children's concerns. SCOPSO furnished these rooms with desks, chairs, stationery and locking file cabinets to ensure the confidentiality of OVC records. Two teachers (1 male, 1 female) from each of the 400 schools completed training on psychosocial support provision. These training sessions lasted three days and focused on concepts such as defining psychosocial support, identifying psychosocial problems in children, strategies for promoting social integration, and counseling. SCOPSO staff subsequently offered refresher training to address challenges, restore energy and motivation among teachers, and to mitigate the effects of teacher turnover within schools. In addition, project staff provided customized technical assistance, mentoring, and coaching to assist the teachers to improve the quality of services delivered. Project staff also advocated with school principals to reduce these teachers' course loads so as to increase their time available to counsel students. World Learning developed and distributed a psychosocial support



⁷ Ministry of Education abstract, 2012-2013

resource guide that provided practical strategies for helping teachers to meet OVC emotional needs in both the classroom and counseling settings.

The project team trained 2 teachers from each school to provide life skills education to students using the Beacon Schools (grades 5-6) and Sport for Life (grades 7-8) that were initially developed by the USAID-funded Health Communications Partnership. This modular curriculum focused on content areas such as critical thinking, communicating with others, self-esteem, imagining the future and healthy decision making. Each module required approximately 3-4 weeks to complete, and the overall program lasted 1 academic year. In some schools, life skills programs were integrated into the school day; in other schools, life skills was introduced as an extra-curricular activity.

Each of SCOPSO's 52,000 beneficiaries received psychosocial support services. 14,382 received counseling services from their teachers, 26,000 participated in life skills education programs, and all of the children engaged in play-based activities using balls and volleyball nets provided by SCOPSO. Through the school core group structure, these activities were integrated into school culture and are expected to continue despite the project's closure.

Healthcare

OVC in good health are less likely to miss school and better able to engage in activities to support their overall wellbeing and development. Due to their compromised immune systems, children infected with HIV are vulnerable to a range of illnesses. As a result, access to quality healthcare is even more critical. However, SCOPSO baseline data indicate that at inception of project interventions 48% OVC reported that they had sought (but did not receive) medical treatment the last time they were sick. Only 3% of OVC demonstrated correct and comprehensive knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention.

SCOPSO's health care component addressed these challenges and reduced barriers to accessing healthcare by providing four types of services to its beneficiaries: 1) provision of funds to cover the costs of medical treatment for sick OVC; 2) referrals for essential health care services, 3) health care education, and 4) HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns.

SCOPSO transferred emergency medical funds directly to school bank accounts to be used when OVC beneficiaries required medical treatment but were unable to cover the costs. Initially, these funds were provided to OVC households on a reimbursement basis. However, the project gradually adopted a direct billing system that allowed clinics to send invoices for services directly to schools. This eliminated the need for OVC or their caregivers to cover any up-front expenses. The project team worked closely with schools to identify nearby public and private health centers, establish relationships with them, and to facilitate referrals for children who required medical attention. Through these relationships, SCOPSO engaged health extension workers and other health professionals to provide health education sessions, general health check-ups and de-worming days within the schools. This service benefitted all students, not just direct beneficiaries.

These sessions focused on a wide range of health issues including HIV prevention, voluntary testing and counseling, basic hygiene, malaria prevention, proper nutrition, and other topics that were selected in collaboration with teachers and students.

Each school integrated plans for meeting the health needs of OVC into their annual action plans in order to identify and priority needs and develop practical strategies to meet these needs. This enabled school-community groups to formulate achievable goals relevant to the health issues faced by OVC.

During each year of the project period, the project's 52,000 benefitted from at least one of these forms of health support. More specifically, 52,000 participated in health education programs, 41,796 children received medical treatment paid for using the project's emergency health fund, and 1,848 received medical care through referrals to local service providers.

Food and Nutrition

Good nutrition is critical for children who are still growing and developing cognitively. Children who have sufficient food to eat are less likely to get sick, less likely to be absent from school, and better able to concentrate on learning because they are not distracted by hunger. However, according to data collected by SCOPSO staff through a baseline survey, 34% of OVC reported eating less than two meals on at least one day during the week prior to the survey.

The SCOPSO contract allocated emergency funding to provide direct nutritional support to approximately 10-15% of the most severely malnourished beneficiaries in order to improve their health and enable them to attend classes more regularly. Some schools chose to use this money to implement school meal programs through school canteens during the academic year for severely malnourished children. Other schools opted to purchase food (such as bags of grain) and give them to households caring for the most underfed OVC.



Unfortunately, the number of OVC in need of food support far outstripped the resources available through the project's emergency nutrition fund. In order to partially close this gap, schools conducted fundraising campaigns to mobilize community resources to provide supplemental meals to support the nutritional needs of OVC. Members of school core groups also linked children with existing school feeding programs in areas where they existed. Over time, as school-led microenterprises began to generate income, schools frequently chose to use this revenue to purchase food for malnourished OVC.

Over the course of the five year project period, 6,539 OVC (51.6% girls) received food the project's nutrition component. This figure includes children who received nutritional support

through the project's emergency fund, children who were referred to local service providers, and children who received food procured using community contributions or income generated by school-led microenterprises. The project exceeded its target of 5,200 (10% of beneficiaries) in large part because of the overwhelming success of the project's community mobilization initiatives.

Shelter and Care

Children living in safe and stable homes are typically better prepared to cope with other challenges. Yet many OVC, particularly in urban areas, lack basic shelter because they are unable to pay rent or maintain homes due to the illness or death of a parent. Without a stable home, these children are sometimes sent to live with distant relatives, placed in abusive care arrangements, or end up living on the streets. The anxiety and psychological stress created by these situations also prevents children from succeeding at school.

To address these concerns, SCOPSO mobilized school core groups to collaborate with community leaders to place children with foster parents in their communities who they know and trust. In cases where OVC had been separated from their families, school core group members traced the relatives or parents of OVC and reunited families. School core groups also spearheaded initiatives to renovate OVC homes that had fallen into disrepair. Schools also occasionally rented rooms close to school compounds for children when other shelter arrangements could not be identified.

As part of this component, the project team addressed other critical OVC needs by providing soap for all beneficiaries and underwear and hair oil for girls. Schools also organized community clothing collections, fundraising campaigns and used revenue from school-led microenterprises to purchase clothing, blankets, and shoes for children.

In total, 28,055 OVC (76.5% girls) received services classified under the shelter and care component over the course of five years. This figure includes all services categorized under this component, and the provision of underwear and hair oil to girls accounts for the significant overachievement relative to the project's target of 13,000 OVC. 450 children's houses were repaired, 216 were placed in foster care, and 607 were reunited with their families through project efforts.

Economic Strengthening

HIV/AIDS contributes to a decrease in productivity and renders households far less resilient to economic shocks. Households affected by HIV typically spend more money on medicine and treatment, and they tend to have less money to spend on food. Common coping strategies include selling assets such as livestock, reducing the number of meals consumed each day, depleting savings in order to pay for expenses, migrating to towns in search of work, withdrawing children from school, hiring children out for agriculture work, asking neighbors for loans, or engaging in

transactional sex. These coping strategies have serious long-term consequences and are often associated with a downward spiral that can lead to destitution.⁸

An improved understanding of child vulnerability informed by new evidence suggests the importance of tackling the longer term issue of economic exclusion, rather than providing only for the immediate needs of OVC.⁹ In order to have lasting impact, SCOPSO adopted several approaches that strengthen the livelihoods of vulnerable children and the households that care for them.

SCOPSO's strategy for improving the economic circumstances of OVC and their households included 4 key components: 1) supporting school-managed microenterprises, 2) establishing and supporting Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) among older OVC and their guardians, 3) transferring productive assets directly to OVC, and 4) providing social and financial education to OVC in partnership with Aflatoun. SCOPSO intervened at the individual, household, and systems levels in order ensure that the needs of OVC are met on a more sustainable basis.

School-managed microenterprises: The SCOPSO team trained members of school core groups on financial management, proposal writing, and how to develop sound business plans. Using these new skills, each of the 400 school core groups identified a feasible, small scale market-driven microenterprise idea that would generate profit to be used to support OVC. On an annual basis, each school submitted a proposal describing their proposed business model, and how they planned to use the revenue generated to support OVC. After reviewing and approving these plans, the SCOPSO team disbursed school incentive awards amounting to approximately \$500 per year for each school-led microenterprise.

Businesses varied considerably based on each school's context, but common businesses included shop rentals, tea rooms, machinery rentals, animal fattening, and school gardens. Profitability also



varied considerably depending on context, but 89% of schools have successfully established businesses that generate steady income for OVC support. More than half of all schools reported mean annual income between 9,000 and 15,000 Ethiopian birr, or between \$450 and \$800. Return on investment analysis shows that these high performing schools fully returned the investment by the third year, on average. However, 25% of schools reported earning only about 3,000 Ethiopian birr per year, or about \$150. The most commonly reported factor

influencing profitability was access to markets or land – some schools had difficulty identifying

⁸ Assessment of USAID/PEPFAR's Economic Strengthening Programs in Ethiopia. August 2010-October 2010. Produced by the LIFT Award.

⁹ Taking Evidence to Impact: Making a Difference for Vulnerable Children in a World With HIV and AIDS. Unicef School-Community Partnership Serving HIV-affected OVC in Primary Schools Final Report submitted by World Learning on September 11, 2014

feasible business ideas because of these constraints. SCOPSO responded to this implementation challenge by introducing a more flexible school incentive award mechanism in the final two years of the project. During years 4 and 5, SCOPSO allowed schools to use school incentive awards for other activities to benefit OVC such as asset transfer or VSLA. This approach enabled schools that faced challenges operating successful microenterprises to invest the funds more appropriately in other ways. Overall, school-led microenterprises proved to be a successful way for most schools to increase internal income for OVC care and support.

Village Savings and Loan Associations: Orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers typically cannot access formal microfinance institutions because of various factors including the absence of formal financial services in remote areas or minimum loan requirements that are too large for ultra-poor households. SCOPSO used the Village Savings and Loan Association model as an alternative microfinance methodology. Through this approach, groups of 10-20 OVC guardians formed a savings group, saved regularly, and borrowed from the group funds. The groups established bylaws that required all loans to be paid back to the group within a 3 month period, along with a 2.5% service charge. These VSLAs encouraged the practice of saving regularly in flexible amounts, reducing expenses associated with borrowing, keeping capital and profits in the community and building social capital.

Evidence suggests that microenterprise programs beginning with a single business training are unlikely to succeed.¹⁰ For this reason, SCOPSO implemented a skills development process which lasted at least 9-12 months and included several phases. SCOPSO adapted a modular training curriculum originally developed by CARE Bangladesh which was delivered to participants over the course of 3 months through weekly sessions lasting approximately 2 hours each. This training was designed to teach participants how to select, plan, and manage a microenterprise and to ensure that market assessment and enterprise viability are part of the planning process. Group by-laws set the condition that guardians must enroll their children in school and encourage their attendance – in this way, the program was explicitly linked to education. VSLA grew to become an important platform for school-home interaction that improved caregiver engagement with their children’s learning. SCOPSO project staff also conducted practical training, mentoring and supervision on a weekly basis in order to provide technical assistance related to managing new businesses.

Participants selected business ideas that did not require technical or vocational skills, and all microenterprises are managed by individuals. Although the government of Ethiopia’s Micro and Small Enterprise Development Agency (MSEDA) puts strong emphasis on promoting the formation of group-managed microenterprises, evidence from Ethiopia suggests that groups often do not operate business activities effectively, and therefore SCOPSO promoted the development of individual businesses.

¹⁰ Assessment of USAID/PEPFAR’s Economic Strengthening Programs in Ethiopia. August 2010-October 2010. Produced by the LIFT Award.

2,552 caregivers of 2,849 OVC participated in 214 VSLA and mobilized 836,856 Birr (\$44,000) in savings over a three year period.

Asset Transfer: In some regions of Ethiopia, the SCOPSO team found that the VSLA model was not feasible. In these circumstances, the SCOPSO project team directly transferred productive assets such as goats, sheep, or a stove to select beneficiaries, which were used to increase household income. This activity targeted child headed households, or OVC living with severely ill parents or caregivers. Economic strengthening working groups were responsible for monitoring whether individual OVC/guardians successfully maintained their assets. SCOPSO found that the asset transfer model worked especially well in pastoral areas. The sale of small livestock generated sufficient income for these children to meet basic needs. 19,591 children (62% girls) benefitted from this activity.



Child Social and Financial Education: SCOPSO provided social and financial education to 43,000 children through Aflatoun’s activity-based curriculum, which World Learning adapted to the Ethiopian context and translated into two local languages. Through this innovative program, children organized and led 156 extra-curricular clubs through which they learned practical financial skills related to planning, budgeting, saving, and investing through constructive engagement with everyday problems. The goal was to provide a safe space for children to engage with the social and market forces that profoundly influence their lives. The program was grounded in the premise that providing access to financial resources at a young age increases the likelihood of financial inclusion when they become adults. The activities provided an ethical foundation for the use of money and other resources such as time and the natural environment, and it facilitated opportunities for children to build assets through the development and management of financial enterprises. Through group savings clubs, the program instilled a savings mindset in participants who served as the primary stewards of the funds with guidance from a teacher advisor.

The SCOPSO project team provided a 5-day training on the Aflatoun methodology to 839 representatives from school core groups, typically members of economic strengthening working groups. These teachers established Aflatoun clubs at their respective schools, and invited all children to join – not just SCOPSO beneficiaries or OVC, which reflects the project’s inclusive, non-stigmatizing approach. Clubs held regular meetings after school and participants voted on a club chairperson, treasurer, and reporter. These elected children led meetings with guidance from the adult advisor. During meetings, children discussed social issues relevant to their lives. For example, a teachers have reported that children discuss issues such as early marriage, chewing *khat*, child labor, and human trafficking. The goal was for children to identify social problems in their communities, brainstorm ways they can help resolve or mitigate them, and then take action

to address the issues. Through these activities, children become empowered by developing the confidence and competencies to advocate for small changes to improve their lives.

Aflatoun clubs encouraged children to save small amounts of money in a group cash box, and they provided children with real life opportunities to make financial decisions. Some children also engaged in microenterprise activities, but the Aflatoun program stipulated that financial enterprises only takes place within the context of school activities in order to prevent children from engaging in labor that undermines their education. At the end of the school year, children withdrew their savings from the cash box and used it according to their plan – many children reported a plan to use their savings to purchase school supplies for the following year. Other typical Aflatoun activities included producing drama presentations about child rights which they performed for their classmates and the community, singing songs, playing games, and going on group field trips.

World Learning leveraged private funding from the Moneygram Foundation and other partners to expand this activity to additional schools and to enhance activities. For example, SCOPSO schools formed 117 linkages with microfinance institutions and banks which created opportunities for financial institutions to provide age-appropriate financial products and services to primary school students. The microfinance industry has developed rapidly in Ethiopia over the past few years, and the nation is widely recognized for its achievements in this area. However, access to financial products and services remains extremely low for children, and the child finance movement is still in its infancy. Through this program, World Learning has helped to pioneer improvements in child finance by establishing sustainable, long-term partnerships between primary schools and banks or microfinance institutions.

These partnerships have resulted in the financial institutions supporting children's financial goals in various ways. For example, bank/MFI partners have assigned officers to participate in regular club meetings, assisted club members to open bank accounts, contributed individual passbooks and savings boxes for students and clubs, and provided encouragement and small incentives to teachers. In addition, some financial institutions have sponsored club events or hosted bank field trips for club members to learn about how banking systems work. In many cases, banks are now offering savings accounts for minors for the first time.

43,000 children (51% beneficiaries) participated in 156 savings clubs and saved 1.5 million ETB (\$77,000) over a 3 year period, or enough for each child, on average, to buy 7 exercise books.

3.2. Result 2: Strengthen School-Community Partnership in 400 Schools to enhance Capacity to Plan and Manage OVC Support Programs

Building the Capacity of Schools to Plan and Manage OVC Care and Support

SCOPSO guided the schools through a series of learning opportunities, including customized training, workshops, reviews, and technical assistance in planning, implementation, and monitoring of OVC care and support activities throughout the life of the project as discussed in the section below.

At the initial phase of the project, SCOPSO conducted Training of Trainer (TOT) events for staff on management of OVC care and support, psychosocial support, and life skills education. The staff members were then mobilized to their respective regions to commence project activities, and, with the support of SCOPSO technical staff and managers in Addis Ababa, conduct project orientation workshops for representatives of Regional State Education Bureaus, regional HAPCOs, Women Affairs, and Labor and Social Affairs to forge partnership and commence regional and school level activities. This was followed by the establishment of school core groups (SCGs) at each of the 400 partner schools. SCOPSO staff then conducted three days of initial training for SCG members from all schools on OVC care and support with a particular focus on OVC selection, and the implementation of SCOPSO and provision of psychosocial support. The psychosocial support training was focused on the emotional needs of OVC, resilience, helping children to overcome grief, play therapy, and communication and counseling skills. For these trainings, World Learning adapted the psychosocial support manual developed by the Positive Change Children, Communities, and Care (PC3) project funded by USAID/PEPFAR. As implementation progressed, SCOPSO staff also rolled out a four-day TOT event for teachers on life skills with a focus on how to develop the self-esteem, self-confidence, communication skills, and decision making abilities of children. For this, SCOPSO used the existing Beacon Schools and Support for Life curricula developed by the Health Communications Partnership for use at primary schools.

At the beginning of the second year, SCOPSO also provided follow-up TOT for staff to further enhance the capacities of SCG members, and members of the six working groups in all 400 partner schools. This support included training on implementation of individual OVC care plans, OVC selection criteria, implementation and financial management of school-led microenterprises, and social and financial education for children. Over 1,800 SCG members from the 400 schools participated in a three-day multi-site training on these topics. To further strengthen capacities at the household level, staff attended in-house training on 11 modules of the (VSLA) methodology and training guidelines. The training was then cascaded over a five-day period to more than 2,000 OVC guardians. Topics included: business skills, savings, and rules and regulations of the associations. This training was focused on the USAID-recommended minimum standards for the implementation of economic strengthening activities.

To ensure that the acquired knowledge and skills are put to use by the members and beneficiaries of the SCGs, SCOPSO project officers stationed in all regions provided frequent supportive supervision visits, as well as on the job training and technical assistance to ensure quality in service delivery and to enhance their capacity to manage OVC care and support. Because high turnover of trained SCG members is a chronic challenge to building capacity, SCOPSO also provided refresher training to members of the SCGs with a focus on the psychosocial needs of OVC, financial management, economic strengthening, community mobilization, and fundraising (as deemed necessary). To review implementation status and develop annual plans of action, the project team also organized stakeholder review meetings in all project sites, targeting regional, zonal, and woreda education personnel.

At the beginning of the third year, SCOPSO conducted training on child social and financial education with the objective of capacitating teachers on the basic concepts, principles, core elements of the Aflatoun curricula that include personal understanding and exploration, planning, budgeting and saving and spending and management of child social and financial education clubs activities. To make skills and knowledge transfer to the education system, cluster school supervisors were actively engaged in the implementation and follow-up of SCOPSO from the beginning. Over all, SCOPSO training benefited 8362 SCG members, cluster supervisors, guardians and teachers. 45% of training participants were women. Table 3 below summarizes major type of training and workshop undertaken by region on various topics.

Table 3: Summary of Major Trainings and Workshops Implemented

No.	Type of training/Workshop	Training Participants	Number of Participants																																			
			Addis Ababa			Amhara			Oromia			SNNPR			Dire Dawa			Harari			Benshangul Gumuz			Afar			Gambella			Somali			Tigray					
			M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T						
1	Life Skills	SCG	91	82	173	160	122	282	74	71	145	91	34	125							4	7	11	11	9	20	8	9	17	18	4	22	9	31	40			
2	Psychosocial Support for OVC	SCG	92	84	176	334	181	515	137	110	247	102	47	149				15	13	28	5	5	10	19	11	30	13	7	20	14	12	26	9	31	40			
3	OVC care and support Management	SCG	146	130	276	829	361	1190	285	180	465	331	92	423	75	51	126	48	44	92	30	11	41	56	15	71	32	7	39	83	24	107	513	494	1007			
4	Sustainability and follow up on OVC care and support	Cluster Supervisors	67	9	76	182	12	194	72	8	80	39	2	41	11	2	13	12	15	27	8	0	8	6	2	8	14	0	14	15	1	16						
5	CSFE methodology	Teachers	11	9	20	99	46	145	47	46	93	38	13	51	5	9	14	6	10	16																		
6	Basics of VSLA	SCG, Guardians	5	72	77	121	492	613	61	430	491	50	186	236	2	31	33	1	57	58	2	49	51										33	7	40			
7	Financial Management	SCG	8	26	34																																	
Total by region			420	412	832	1725	1214	2939	676	845	1521	651	374	1025	93	93	186	82	139	221	49	72	121	92	37	129	67	23	90	130	41	171	564	563	1127			

Over the course of the five year implementation period, SCOPSO improved OVC school enrollment and attendance, and strengthened the capacity of schools to deliver critical services to OVC. SCOPSO employed various capacity-building strategies and introduced functional support systems at schools and in communities that will ensure the continuity of OVC support and care following completion of the project. These include school-led microenterprises managed by SCGs to enhance the income generated by schools to support OVC. As discussed in the capacity-building section above, SCGs have completed a series of structured capacity strengthening activities which equipped them with the skills to identify OVC requiring support, conduct needs assessments, prioritize planned support, and follow up on children's overall wellbeing and academic progress.

Serving as a bridge between the school and households, SCGs now oversee economic strengthening schemes, such as village savings and loan associations, and asset transfer schemes, which have restored livelihoods that had been eroded by the devastating economic consequences of HIV/AIDS. This approach also resulted in improved home-school relationships.

SCOPSO has laid a strong foundation within schools to ensure a systematic approach to providing the necessary support for OVC. The SCOPSO team closely supported the SCGs and nurtured efforts to track children's academic progress and wellbeing. These efforts have grown into a comprehensive system for filing and maintaining profiles for each individual OVC student. The system has paved the way for increased SCG engagement in efforts to mitigate the challenges faced by OVC. With overall supported from their respective SCGs, teachers have assumed full ownership over the provision of care and support activities.

School-led Microenterprises

Throughout the project, SCOPSO project officers provided technical assistance to SCGs to develop school proposals for OVC support. These proposals were periodically reviewed and approved for funding in the form of OVC school incentive awards to operate microenterprise activities. Project officers and technical staff monitored the implementation of the action plans with a focus on issues related to sustainability, comprehensiveness of services, management of school microenterprises, and the utilization of OVC service data for the internal decision making of schools. Because SCGs have gone through the experiential learning cycle of doing and reflecting, the technical skills and knowledge they now possess will allow them to continue these activities, and a number of schools have already succeeded in raising funds from other sources. As part of the exit strategy, SCOPSO also encouraged schools to rent-out their microenterprises to third parties to relieve SCGs from the burden of managing daily transactions and sales. As a result they have steady income streams from rent of the container shops, workshops, cafeterias, and tea houses. With this regular income, there is great potential that OVC support will continue once SCOPSO is completed.

Community Mobilization

SCOPSO carried out community mobilization activities as part of its strategy to sustain OVC care and support activities beyond the project period, and to develop ownership on the part of

communities. Assisted by the project team, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and the different OVC support groups described above, strived to bring the community on board and ensured their full participation. Monthly meetings for guardians, and bi-weekly and weekly VSLA and asset transfer beneficiaries meetings served as forums for community awareness-raising and mobilization. Community conversation efforts of school community groups and PTAs played vital roles in strengthening school-community relations in terms of creating a better understanding of OVC problems, and detection and response mechanisms. Kebele Education and Training Management Boards (KETBs) also provided support through school fee exemptions for OVC.

Community participation is a core element of sustainability of SCOPSO. Throughout implementation, communities, faith-based organizations, governmental, and nongovernment actors provided contributions in the form of cash for food and nutritional support, in-kind donations such as school uniforms, food items and grains and labor in construction of microenterprise centers and harvesting of crops dedicated for OVC support in their respective local communities. Most in-kind contributions were in rural areas, and included grains such as wheat and maize for food support (See Table 4 below for details). SCGs and the six program area working groups reached out to the above sources individually and collectively to raise the contributions.

Presently, 380 schools or 95 percent of all schools supported by SCOPSO are benefiting from improved school-community relationships that frequently generate critical resources for OVC - resources that will remain even when SCOPSO funding has phased out. Over the past five years, these schools have raised a total of 9,760,221.84 ETB (around \$600,000) from their communities. The following table details the contributions by type and year.

Table 4: Summary of Community Resource Contributions

S.N.	Years	Cash	Material	Labor	Total
1	Year 5	300,351.50	366,826.00	641,708.50	1,308,886.00
2	Year 4	347,631.00	636,664.00	1,440,633.00	2,424,928.00
3	Year 3	558,653.50	515,280.00	504,839.00	1,578,772.50
4	Year 2	1,066,047.55	960,721.50	1,883,024.46	3,909,793.51
5	Year 1	537,841.83	0	0	537,841.83
TOTAL		1,714,030.05	1,964,211.50	3,965,365.96	9,760,221.84

The Role of Cluster School Supervisors

From its inception, SCOPSO engaged more than 300 cluster supervisors in important aspects of project implementation. These Woreda Education Office (WEO) employees played a critical role in linking schools with their respective WEOs. Through their regular supervision, they have taken the opportunity to work closely with project officers in the field and become familiar with the tools and approaches of SCOPSO. They have incorporated OVC support into their regular monitoring checklists and now represent a cadre of qualified professionals available to support and monitor the

continued efforts of teachers at schools formerly supported by SCOPSO. By developing interventions in close partnership with schools and communities, SCOPSO has laid the groundwork for partner schools to continue to independently support OVC, support other schools to establish similar programs, and apply the program methodologies and tools to other community-driven activities. Cluster supervisors play a very important role, since they are familiar with this successful model and are well positioned to facilitate the replication of similar OVC support activities at other schools in the same cluster. In order to achieve this, SCOPSO held sustainability workshops focused on OVC program management, and provided technical assistance to schools for cluster supervisors. During closeout events at the school level, the supervisors expressed their readiness to continue supporting SCGs in their efforts to remove barriers to OVC education in schools. The engagement of cluster supervisors, beginning from the design phase, has proven to be a successful approach to enhancing sustainability and systems integration at the schools. Finally, in an effort to address turnover of supervisors, SCOPSO managed to increase their number to 402 by the end of the project.

Strengthening Home-School Relationships

Through its approach to community mobilization, SCOPSO has raised awareness about OVC among community members, and equipped schools with systems for strengthening home – school relations. These include community awareness-raising events led by SCGs and PTAs, community outreach activities organized by school clubs, and weekly or bi-weekly meetings with guardians, who are mainly beneficiaries of VSLA economic strengthening activities. Parents and guardians also attended school events at the beginning of school year midterm and annual closing of schools. Members of the SCG and psychosocial working group members also visited the homes of orphans to assess their situation and provide support through linkages with the Kebele administrative units to improve the conditions of residential homes, and provided sleepwear for children in need. These home visits and other outreach activities resulted in improved parental/guardian engagement with the school. Teachers and caregivers have also joined hands to address the needs of OVC. This is demonstrated the extent to which school teachers have become like surrogate families for OVC, assuming additional responsibilities for caring for children at school. Perhaps SCOPSO’s greatest impact has been a cultural and attitudinal shift among teachers. As teachers learned more about the immense daily challenges faced by OVC, they were less likely to label the children as “trouble makers” when they misbehaved. Instead, they committed themselves to working with caregivers to identify lasting solutions to the root causes of these children’s misbehavior.

Partnerships with Stakeholders

SCOPSO assisted schools to establish partnerships with local health centers which resulted in increased access to medical services for orphans and vulnerable children. These linkages also created opportunities for health workers to provide basic health education sessions for all students, which has benefited entire communities. These relationships form a foundation for future collaboration between schools and health clinics to jointly address the health needs of both OVC and entire student bodies.

Additionally, the social and financial education component for children has served as a mechanism to link schools with financial institutions, such as banks and Micro-finance institutions (MFIs), whose main role is to improve financial access and financial literacy to their clients. With the support of SCOPSO, OVC households became clients of these institutions for the very first time. At the conclusion of SCOPSO small bank windows were being erected at schools by the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, to be managed by the students themselves.

These new school-based banking activities are a direct result of the SCOPSO initiative to teach financial literacy, promote financial inclusion, and improve access to financial services and products benefitting children. Partnerships between schools and banks are an important element of the strategy. Students in the saving clubs had been using saving boxes made of local materials to save their money before the bank linkages were established. As discussed in the economic strengthening section, more than 115 of such linkages had been forged by the end of SCOPSO. Students serve as accountants, cashiers, chairpersons, and record-keepers for the banks and they have full privileges to manage the passbooks at the schools.

4. PROJECT SUCCESS, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 Successes

Engaging schools as focal points for OVC care and support

SCOPSO engaged school-community groups known as school core groups comprised of teachers, PTA members, Kebele Education and Training Board representatives, and OVC themselves in all aspects of activity design, planning, and implementation.

The project assisted schools to develop mechanisms for retaining OVC and tracking their wellbeing and academic performance. SCOPSO has resulted in new ways to identify vulnerable children and to monitor their attendance and academic performance, which is

paramount for providing support. SCOPSO also improved awareness among teachers about OVC issues and introduced a care provision strategy in core areas including educational support, psychosocial support, health care, food, shelter, and economic strengthening. This holistic, integrated approach helped to transform community perceptions of what schools can do, and has led to improved community engagement at school.

“Before the introduction of SCOPSO, support for OVC in primary schools was minimal to non-existent. Although some individual teachers or faith-based organizations provided assistance to OVC, this support was neither comprehensive nor consistently available. Often teachers and community members exhibited limited understanding of the challenges that tend to prevent OVC from attaining academic success. Over the past five years, SCOPSO’s holistic approach to providing comprehensive care for OVC has sparked positive changes in the primary school.”

—Principal at beneficiary school

Systems strengthening and capacity development for schools are vital for school-based OVC care and support

Comprehensive human and institutional capacity development is essential to increase school-community ownership and to ensure the sustainability of initiatives focused on improving care and support for OVC. SCOPSO outcomes have demonstrated that by creating awareness about the challenges of OVC among the school community and equipping them with the knowledge and tools to provide care and support to OVC, effective mechanisms to plan and manage OVC care can be realized.

“The OVC funds alone can’t do much without proper training, coaching, and follow up. SCOPSO provided us support to mobilize our community, to operate school microenterprises, and to provide psychosocial services to OVC. We have retained a lot of this knowledge on how to deliver services for many OVC effectively.”

*—Care coordinator at
Wuchale Primary School,
Amhara*

SCOPSO approached capacity development for schools in various ways and at multiple levels. From the project’s inception, SCOPSO oriented the Regional, Zonal, and Woreda level stakeholders to the project’s goals, objectives, and strategies. At the school level, PTA leaders, school principals, and community representatives received training on managing OVC

care and support systems. The project team facilitated short-term, multi-site training for care coordinators on psychosocial support and life-skills education, economic strengthening, school financial management, and child social and financial education. Based on implementation challenges, refresher training was held, as necessary. After four years of close collaboration with cluster school supervisors, the team provided specific training on OVC monitoring to supervisors for follow-up technical support after SCOPSO phased out. Project officers and technical staff provided tailored and ongoing technical assistance to each SCG on a monthly basis in response to implementation challenges.

Provision of confidential counseling in school-based psychosocial support centers improved school-home interaction and helped OVC overcome challenges

400 schools have established centers where care coordinators hold confidential meetings with children in a private setting, without interruption, to assess needs, plan for support, and make referrals. In some cases, these centers started out as unused rooms within the schools and were renovated by school core group members. SCOPSO furnished these rooms with desks, chairs, locking file cabinets, client register books, and other resources to support the documentation of consultations and maintain confidential OVC profiles. The existence of these centers enabled OVC to easily reach care providers and to openly discuss their needs with a caring adult. Discussions with school leaders indicate that many plan to continue to use these rooms as centers of support for OVC in the long run.

“There was one orphan girl who lives with her aunt’s family. One day, her math teacher told me the girl sleeps while he is teaching. I asked her what her problem was. And she told me that she was treated unfairly in her aunt’s house. She had a heavy work load, and she was responsible for cooking and cleaning for her aunt’s children. She was already tired when she arrived at school. And she had no time to study. I went to her aunt and sat down with her to talk about the girl’s situation at school. I convinced her to treat the girl like one of her own. From that day, this girl started showing progress. She became one of the outstanding students.”

—Psychosocial support provider, Wuchale Primary School, Amhara

In addition, informal qualitative assessments suggest that counseling support contributed to stronger relationships among teachers and OVC students. Prior to SCOPSO, teachers exhibited limited understanding about the challenges faced by OVC. Based on this lack of information, teachers would often take punitive measures when OVC were late for class sessions, failed to complete homework assignments, or performed poorly on exams. They simply did not understand the connection between a child’s emotional state and his or her behavior in the classroom. Teachers weren’t aware that OVC often suffer from anxiety, depression, lack of self-esteem, discrimination, grief, or other challenges. Over time, psychosocial support providers at schools began sharing information with other teachers until a school-wide shift in attitude and understanding had taken place. This, in turn, created a more comfortable classroom environment for OVC students. SCOPSO also developed a resource guide for psychosocial support at schools.

Economic strengthening support for OVC and their households improves resiliency

SCOPSO's strategy for improving the economic circumstances of OVC and their households included four key components: 1) supporting school-managed microenterprises, 2) establishing and supporting modified Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) among older OVC and their guardians, 3) transferring productive assets directly to older OVC, and 4) providing social and financial education to OVC in partnership with Aflatoun. SCOPSO tested these models and found that the integration of economic strengthening was essential to the overall success of the program.



More than 65,000 OVC beneficiaries and their caregivers benefitted from SCOPSO economic strengthening interventions. Among these, close to 20,000 (62 percent female) OVC and their caregivers received support through the VSLA and asset transfer schemes. Approximately 43,000 children (50 percent OVC) participated in child social and financial education activities through which they collectively saved \$77,000 over a three-year period.

School-led microenterprises represent a successful model for supporting OVC to attend school and often result in improved relationships with local government

It is often challenging to reach all OVC with individual or household level interventions. For this reason, SCOPSO established school-led enterprises to generate income to support OVC in need. Over a five-year period, 353 out of a total of 400 schools established one or more profitable, school-managed enterprises using school incentive awards provided by the project as seed funding. Schools designed a wide range of microenterprises, depending on their context. Some common enterprises included renting shop or tea room rentals or school gardens. At the time of project closeout, more than half of these schools were producing an annual income ranging from 9,000–15,000 Birr, which is sufficient to supply uniforms and school supplies for approximately 40–60 OVC. Analysis of return on investment indicates that more than half of schools in the above category returned the initial investment in the form of SIA fully within the first four years of the project period. This enhanced capacity of schools to independently finance OVC care and support programs has resulted in improved relationships between schools and Woreda level government authorities and communities.

Networking and community mobilization are essential elements of school-based programs to support OVC

SCOPSO's community mobilization approach resulted in increased awareness of how to provide care and support for OVC among a broad range of community stakeholders. SCOPSO promoted networking and linkages with businesses, women's groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, health centers, and individuals. Since schools and children are most likely to use those resources and services that they identify within their own communities, SCOPSO's approach to community engagement maximized the likelihood that as many OVC as possible would receive the services they needed.

Provision of nutritious meals for the most vulnerable OVC leads to improved concentration

Receiving food at school creates a powerful incentive for students to remain in school for a full day and it also improves children's ability to concentrate on learning, rather than hunger, while they are in class. Since SCOPSO began providing food support to 6,539 children, the attendance of all of these students has improved significantly.

4.2 Challenges

OVC access to health services was limited by the health fund's reimbursement process

Initially, the use of emergency health funds required children to follow a two-step process. First, a child visited a health facility and was expected to pay for the full cost of treatment. Afterwards, the OVC or his/her guardian was required to submit documentation to the child's school for reimbursement. The required documents included a medical certificate, a copy of the prescription, and a receipt. This cumbersome system limited children's access to healthcare because guardians were often unable to pay for the treatment and the reimbursement process was too complicated. SCOPSO overcame this challenge by implementing a system of referrals and linkages, which allowed health centers to bill schools directly for any services provided to SCOPSO beneficiaries.

Ensuring safe and stable shelter for OVC

Schools struggle to ensure that OVC students live in safe and stable homes. This is particularly true for double orphans, who comprised about one-fifth of all beneficiaries. SCOPSO addressed these challenges by engaging community members and local administrations to find practical solutions for each unique set of circumstances. Additionally, SCOPSO's economic strengthening support at the household level helped many guardians to generate enough income to cover the rental costs of a home.

High demand for food support

Food shortages and nutritional deficiencies continue to negatively impact OVC performance at school and reduce overall student wellbeing. Funding limitations meant that SCOPSO was not able to meet all of its beneficiaries' needs for food support. SCOPSO mitigated this challenge by prioritizing those OVC households facing the most severe shortages, enrolling households in

economic strengthening programs, mobilizing communities for in kind food support, and by encouraging schools to use revenue from school-based enterprises to cover the cost of food for impoverished children.

Limited access to markets

The profitability of school-managed microenterprises varies widely across schools and contexts. Typically, the most successful microenterprises tend to be renting shops, tearooms, or land, but this is not universally true. For example, at the time of project closeout Temenja Yaj primary school in Addis Ababa was earning 3,000 Birr per month from renting two shops near the school gate. This contrasts sharply with Yetimihirt Bilichta Primary School, also located in Addis Ababa, which lacks the space to build a rental shop and instead relies on selling tea to teachers and revenue generated from the staff cafeteria, amounting to only 200 Birr per month, on average. This revenue is only enough to cover a uniform and school supplies for a single OVC student each month. In schools where school-based microenterprises proved to be less successful, SCOPSO redirected funds to more viable household level economic strengthening interventions.

High levels of school staff turnover

High turnover is endemic within the education sector of Ethiopia. This presented a challenge because each time a teacher, cluster supervisor, or principal resigned from his or her position, the school lost that person's knowledge, skills and experiences managing OVC care and support activities. SCOPSO compensated for this loss of human capital by providing refresher training, as needed, to address gaps that emerged when teachers who had been trained left a school.

Constraints related to CSA Proclamation 621

Ethiopia's Charities and Societies Agency, the government body responsible for regulating NGOs, passed a law that significantly limited SCOPSO's ability to implement any activities that explicitly promotes child rights. Due to this legal constraint, USAID instructed World Learning not to implement the child protection component of SCOPSO which would have focused on improving access to legal and protection services for OVC.

4.3 Innovations

Based on lessons learned and programmatic recommendations from World Learning, USAID requested several modifications in the design of the SCOPSO model. Through an iterative process, SCOPSO evolved over time to address the needs of 12,000 additional OVC, incorporate a more robust economic strengthening component, and to place greater emphasis on ensuring long term sustainability. The economic strengthening component includes promotion of child social and financial education, establishment of village savings and loan associations, and the transfer of productive assets to OVC and their guardians.

Child social and financial education

In partnership with Aflatoun, SCOPSO engaged more than 44,950 children in social and financial

education through an activity-based curriculum, adapted to the Ethiopian context. Through this innovative program, children organized and led extra-curricular clubs through which they learned practical financial skills related to planning, budgeting, saving, and investing through constructive engagement with everyday problems. Through savings clubs, children found a safe space to engage with the social and market forces that profoundly influence their lives. By providing access to financial resources at a young age, children are less likely to experience financial exclusion when they become adults. The model provides an ethical foundation for the use of money and other resources, such as time and the natural environment, and it facilitates opportunities for children to build assets through the development and management of financial enterprises. Through group savings clubs, the program instills a savings mindset in participants and they serve as the primary stewards of the funds with guidance from a teacher who plays an advisory role. These clubs also provide an important opportunity for OVC to interact with their non-OVC peers. More than 2,662 savings clubs were active at the conclusion of the project, and organized events including drama presentations on social issues such as child labor, HIV/AIDS, climate change, and early marriage with the goal of mobilizing their communities for action. Clubs frequently organized school cleaning days, repaired furniture, and demonstrated their careful stewardship of their school environment. SCOPSO also connected these young savers to more than 100 financial institutions to increase access to youth friendly banking and financial products and services.

Adaptation of Village Savings and Loan Association model for school-based OVC care and support programs

Orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers typically cannot access formal microfinance institutions because of various factors including age restrictions, the absence of formal financial services in remote areas, or minimum loan requirements that are too large for ultra-poor households. SCOPSO utilizes the Village Savings and Loan Association model as an alternative micro-finance methodology based within the school. Through this approach, groups of OVC (age 15 or older) and/or guardians form a savings group, save regularly, and borrow from the group funds. These groups meet within school compounds and have become a platform for increased school-guardian interaction on a weekly basis.

Improved school-community partnership

None of the schools experienced the current level of community awareness and support prior to SCOPSO, and all have benefited from improved school-community relationships. At Yimihirt Bilcheta Primary School, Director Sisay says, “Prior to [SCOPSO], there was a weak relationship between the community and the school. Now, there is an awareness of the importance of working together.” When SCOPSO ended in 2014, schools became completely responsible for providing and financing OVC support. Engaging local governments in OVC care will be an important part of ensuring the continued support of OVC post-SCOPSO. One example of this is that schools and the SCOPSO staff worked with the local administration to have land set aside for school-based microenterprises. The strong school-community partnerships created through SCOPSO are

valuable for soliciting additional support from local governments.

OVC support and care integrated in the education system

The integration of OVC support and care into the education system is one of SCOPSO's most important legacies. Woreda education offices now include the provision of support for OVC students in their education quality supervision checklists, and schools include OVC support and care in their annual work plan. Woreda education offices and community members work together to find joint solutions to address the challenges faced by OVC students.

4.4 Lessons Learned

Lessons learned from SCOPSO suggest the importance of tackling the longer-term issue of economic exclusion, rather than providing only for the immediate needs of OVC. Although the dire situations of OVC may intuitively imply the need for an emergency response, programs focusing exclusively on the provision of material services to individual children will not be sustainable over time. Approaches that strengthen the livelihoods of vulnerable children and the households that care for them are more likely to be successful. By helping to build and protect children's assets, we ensure that the critical needs of children are met on a more sustainable basis.

Lessons Learned from VSLA

Increased income from participation in VSLA directly benefits the child: Discussions with both OVC and guardians demonstrate that increased household income through VLSA improves the living conditions and overall wellbeing of OVC. Guardians are better able to provide for OVC, most often spending their earned income on food and clothes. In some instances, guardians have also repaired their homes or bought mattresses and blankets for OVC. VSLA participation has also enabled students to remain in school who would otherwise drop out.

Participation in VSLA restores hope and builds social capital: VSLA members in Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, and Addis Ababa expressed that prior to participation in VSLA they felt hopeless and could not provide for their children. A VSLA member from SNNPR noted that her husband died shortly before she joined the VSLA. She had no income and was depressed because she could not meet her children's basic needs. Her participation in VSLA, however, gave her a chance to receive financial training and now she earns income for her family. Another example is a mother participating in the Yekatit 25 Primary School VSLA in Amhara. She explained, "Before membership in VSLA I had a terrible life. After the intervention I bought a goat and I was able to breed it. Now my life is improving. I used to beg for money from relatives, but now I have capital and don't have to beg." SCOPSO's experience demonstrates an increased sense of community among VSLA participants. The chairman of the Yekatit 25 VSLA explains, "One of the bylaws of the group is to support each other. It helps people socialize and to support each other." A Kulfo school VSLA member described this benefit of VSLA by saying, "This support has drawn us

closer to the school. We are willing to contribute when possible and have developed a commitment to the school. We feel involved and engaged because of what we have learned.”

OVC who participate in VSLA are more likely to finance their own educations: In many cases, older OVC who participate in VSLA have successfully financed their own educations. For example, one eighth grader at Hibret Primary School in Gondar who participates in the VSLA is not only able to finance his living expenses and basic educational expenses, but also pays 200 birr monthly for extracurricular computer classes. He described that through his participation in the VSLA, he began saving 15 Birr each week in the first year, 30 Birr each week during the second year, and currently saves 60 Birr each week in his third year of participation with the group. He now earns between 120 and 200 Birr weekly and plans to use his savings to buy the necessary materials for his secondary education.

Lessons learned from implementing child social and financial education programs

Participation in CSFE improves student behavior: School leaders have noted that OVC behavior often suffers when they lose their parents. Since the inception of CSFE clubs in their schools, many schools have observed positive changes in student behavior. At Durame No.1 Primary School in SNNPR, School Principal Director Teshome Gidore observed that students in CSFE “become more responsible for themselves, the school, and other students.”

CSFE promotes unity among students: When asked about the benefits of CSFE, students pointed to the importance of having time to interact with other children in a positive environment outside of the classroom. A fourth grader at Yetimihirt Bilichta Primary School in Addis Ababa said that CSFE was important to him because “CSFE gives us time to be together with other kids.” CSFE also helps break down some of the differences between OVC and other students. Care Coordinator at Alaba Ediget primary school said one of the major benefits of CSFE is that it teaches students to “help each other, love each other, and support each other socially, particularly OVC. It helps them avoid stigma and discrimination.”

CSFE clubs transform vulnerable children into successful entrepreneurs: CSFE members at Gessela Shashe Primary School in Oromia are learning about planning, budgeting, and running an enterprise by selling chicken eggs. CSFE members submit plans outlining what they will do with their savings, and are then given the money. Last year, students bought chickens and are now profiting from egg sales.

SCOPSO encourages active engagement CSFE members to start their own microenterprises. Several schools had positive experiences helping CSFE club members start their own small businesses. OVC can benefit from achieving some financial independence from their guardians. This independence often eases financial tensions at home and helps OVC finance a portion of their

education (often in the form of school supplies) independently. CSFE clubs help provide the skills students need to become financially independent, and prepare them to finance their education once SCOPSO ends.

CSFE teaches students valuable life skills such as time management, good citizenship and critical thinking: These skills are important benefits of CSFE clubs. Unlike other students, OVC generally lack a family support system, making these skills especially important for OVC. When asked about the most important lesson she learned from being a member of CSFE club at her school, an eighth grader at Mersa School said, “CSFE taught me time management skills.” Club members also learn the rights of citizens during CSFE. Finally, during CSFE club students are encouraged to share their opinions and express themselves. CSFE provides an environment where students are rewarded for creativity. As a CSFE club member at Halaba Edget Primary School in SNNPR explains, “We learn how to develop our own ideas and implement them practically.”

CSFE promotes active learning at schools: The Aflatoun methodology emphasizes learning through plays, songs, and drama. Since the school started CSFE, the School Director at Wuchale Primary School says, “The school’s teachers are not afraid to use singing and dancing in their lessons anymore.”

CSFE clubs have a positive impact on communities: CSFE provides students with the opportunity to perform dramas and hold events for the entire community during CSFE Day events at schools. These events allow students to discuss important issues with the community. The organized events held by CSFE provide a platform for students to interact positively with their community.

Partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions are a major breakthrough for sustainability: Partner financial institutions have supported children’s financial goals in many ways. Financial institutions assign officers to participate in regular CSFE club meetings, assisted club members to open bank accounts, provided individual passbooks and savings boxes for students for free, and provided incentives to students and teachers. In addition, some financial institutions sponsored club events or hosted bank visits for club members to learn about how banking systems work. In many cases, banks are now offering savings accounts for minors for the first time.

Spirit of volunteerism among teachers and students: In an effort to deal with the diverse and complex problems that put the lives of orphans at risk, SCOPSO has engaged teachers as the backbone of care and support initiatives. These volunteer teachers coordinate care for OVC in education, psychosocial, health support, food and nutrition, shelter and care, and economic strengthening. The provision of this kind of holistic care for OVC was made effective by substantial teachers’ commitment to serve OVC.

Yehualashet Seifu, a third grade English teacher and department head at Worha Yekatit Primary school in Addis Ababa who has worked for SCOPSO throughout its implementation says, “I teach 14 hours a week, and I am also a department head. This is an additional task that I assume by choice. Though I sometimes feel overburdened, it satisfies me to contribute what I can for those children.”

Following the start of SCOPSO, a strong spirit of volunteerism emerged in many of primary schools. As Yehualashet explains, “SCOPSO’s largest impact has been a cultural and attitude shift toward volunteerism among the teachers. They are involved in the project and are taking ownership of supporting OVC.”

In some communities, this sentiment of volunteerism has spread beyond the school to the community. A 62- year-old retiree, Nega Manahlot is a good example. He is a volunteer care coordinator at Tiwuld Afera School in Gondar. Manahlot is engaged in mobilizing his community through fundraising efforts that have yielded cash, labor, and material contributions resulting in the provision of shelter for critically vulnerable in-need OVC students at the school.

SCOPSO created a chance for non-OVC students to gain awareness about their peer OVC students and to become engaged in OVC student support in many ways. CSFE clubs fund-raising and micro enterprising activities that are mainly conducted for supporting OVC students are primarily led by non OVC students. For example, a sixth grader at Fitch primary school donated pottery products she made for the school to sell in support of OVC students. “Aflatoun taught us to do good to our community,” she said. “And I contribute my share by presenting my clay as a gift to school. I feel so proud when they sell it and earn money to help other students in need. I also am teaching them the art of clay, so that they can generate some income on their own.”

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The SCOPSO project yielded programmatic recommendations for the possible future scale up or replication of the initiative in additional Ethiopian primary schools or in other contexts. These recommendations, if implemented, are also likely to bolster the success and ensure the continuity of the interventions in the schools that SCOPSO supported. They are derived from the final performance evaluation findings, informal discussions with stakeholders, and a synthesis of lessons learned by project staff across all regions of Ethiopia. The following recommendations are intended for Ethiopia’s Ministry of Education, Regional State Education Bureaus, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa Administration Bureaus of Education, local non-governmental organizations working in the area of OVC support and the international donor community.

- With technical assistance from cluster school supervisors, schools should incorporate plans for delivering OVC support services as part of their annual school improvement plans.

- School principals should mitigate the negative effects of high turnover rates among teachers and PTA members by developing plans to improve school core group performance and to review progress toward meeting goals on a quarterly or semi-annual basis. Plans should be circulated widely among staff and PTA members.
- Woreda Education Offices and Regional State Education Bureaus should provide technical support to ensure the effective management of school-led microenterprises and hold schools accountable for using all revenue generated by these businesses to support vulnerable students. When school principals resign, Woreda Education Offices should update signatory information for school bank accounts.
- The Ministry of Education and the Regional State Education Bureaus should consider earmarking school grants to support OVC that are proportional to the number of OVC enrolled in each school in order to further institutionalize OVC support at schools.
- Lessons learned through SCOPSO indicate that holding community events at school positively impacts parent/guardian engagement in children’s education and improves relationships between teachers and families. For example, organizing VSLA groups through schools had the unintended benefit of increasing interaction between OVC households and the wider community. Schools should continue to host events involving OVC guardians, and child-led clubs should continue outreach activities in communities to strengthen school-community relationships.
- There would be value in conducting an ex-post evaluation in 2016, two years after the completion of SCOPSO in order to assess the sustainability of the interventions and draw conclusions relevant for future initiatives
- Future school-based OVC support initiatives should explicitly measure learning outcomes in order to strengthen the evidence base and demonstrate the relationship between improved child wellbeing and learning.
- Initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable children should focus on improving the “strengths and resources” of children and families rather than on meeting their “needs and deficits.” Empowering parents and guardians to care for children long-term by lowering their socioeconomic vulnerability offers the best approach to improving child wellbeing.
- Donors should consider expanding school-based OVC support programs to the secondary school level in order to support children’s transition to high school. This is

especially important for girl OVC, who are much less likely than their male peers to enroll in secondary school.

- OVC inclusion strategies should be incorporated into other large, donor funded education projects even if their technical focus is not OVC support. For example, the anticipated USAID-funded READ Community Outreach project should explicitly seek to include OVC in its interventions and develop an OVC inclusion plan to ensure that this takes place in the same way that projects often develop inclusion plans for other marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities or girls.