

A group of young boys are gathered around a table, looking at a drawing on a wall. The boy in the foreground is wearing a light blue shirt and has a short haircut. The boy to his left is wearing a dark blue shirt. The boy to his right is wearing a red and white checkered shirt. The background shows a wall with a drawing of a person's face and some text in Amharic.

LEARNING BRIEF

Street children taking part in ChildSPACE activities, facilitated by GOAL's implementing partner, the Centre of Concern, which provides safe spaces, learning opportunities, and support for vulnerable youth in Hawassa City, Ethiopia.

**PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CONFLICT
AND DROUGHT-AFFECTED CHILDREN;
CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES
GOAL ETHIOPIA**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child-Friendly Spaces are specific areas thoughtfully designed and implemented to provide safe and accessible environments for children who have been affected by a range of crises. These spaces serve as important hubs where children develop numeracy skills, learn about acceptable behaviour, understand, and identify forms of child abuse and exploitation, while receiving much-needed counselling and emotional support.

Child-Friendly Spaces play a critical role in helping children vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and family separation recover from traumatic experiences during times of crisis. From April 2022 to December 2023, GOAL Ethiopia established 14 Child-Friendly Spaces, supporting over 32,000 children impacted by the conflict and drought in Oromia and Somali Region of Ethiopia. Through these spaces, there were significant improvements in the safeguarding, social networks, coping abilities, educational capacities, and emotional health of the children served.

BACKGROUND

Since 2020, there have been two major crises in Ethiopia, threatening the well-being of children: conflict and drought. From November 2020 to June 2021, over 6,000 unaccompanied or separated children were identified and registered for protection and assistance, while an additional 720,000 children were displaced by fighting across the region of Tigray in the northern part of Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2021). Conditions in displacement sites and refugee camps are overcrowded, unsanitary, and unsafe, magnifying the risks of gender-based violence, abuse or exploitation, and water-borne diseases for those living there due to conflict. In Ethiopian regions severely affected by drought, the number of child marriage cases increased by 264% in Somali, by 69% in Oromia, and by 38% in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) compared to the same period (January- April) of the previous year, based on government data and UNICEF Analysis (ReliefWeb, 2022). Child labour, street begging and an increase in the number of school dropouts and early marriages were also observed in drought-affected areas. A significant number of people, especially women, girls, and persons with disabilities, faced profound challenges due to the impact of conflict and severe drought.

DATE

June 2024

THEMES

Protection

Child protection

LOCATION

June 2024

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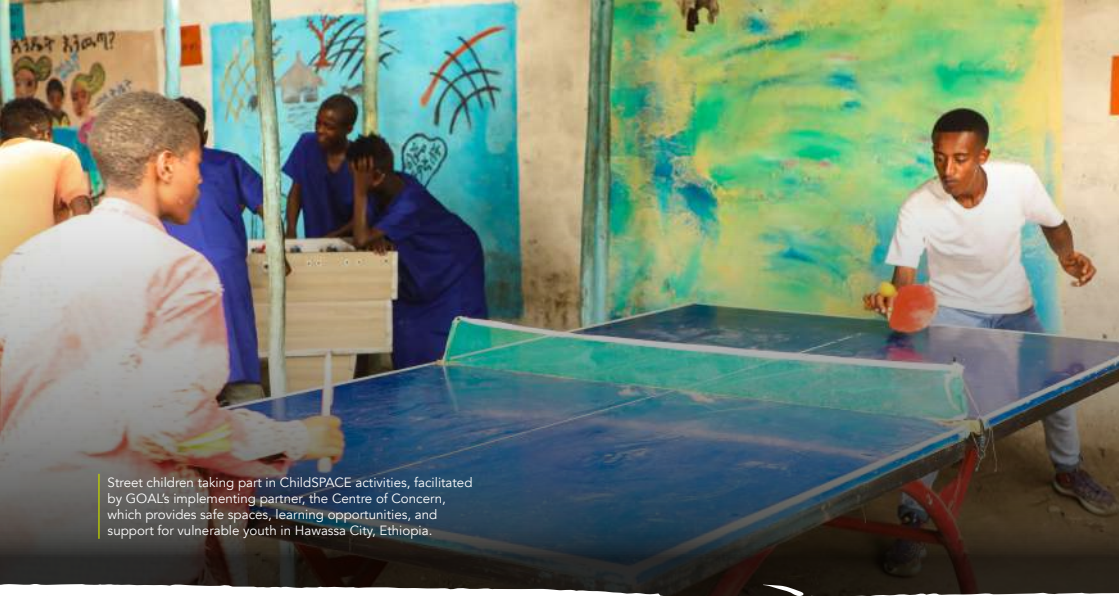
Government – Women
and Social Affairs Office

INTERVENTION DATES

April 2022 – December
2023

COST(S)

\$6600



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METHODOLOGY

In response to the pressing need for child protection and addressing gender-based violence, GOAL undertook a comprehensive approach through a multisectoral project funded by Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The project was implemented in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, Oromia, Somali and SNNP Regions. Support included establishing safe spaces; facilitating positive parenting sessions; providing financial assistance for scholastic materials and basic needs; conducting child case management services, family tracing and reunification; response services for child GBV survivors; and providing child protection training and awareness for government stakeholders, child protection committees, community members, and children.

As part of this project, GOAL established 14 Child-Friendly Spaces to provide much-needed assistance and care to unaccompanied and separated, displaced children living with caregivers, and children who were deeply affected by the combination of conflict and drought. Through these spaces, GOAL reached 32,716 children (15,299 girls and 17,417 boys), providing them with critical psychosocial support and much-needed access to education and recreational activities. The Child-Friendly Spaces were thoughtfully managed and closely monitored by experienced protection officers and trained case workers. These individuals possess a deep understanding of the unique cultural context and could connect with the children in our care. With their dedication and support, these spaces provide an invaluable opportunity for the children to develop essential skills, expand their knowledge, engage in playful activities, and cultivate resilience during prolonged conflict and drought.

GOAL is guided in its work by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) principles, namely: the right to survival and development; non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; and participation and respect for the views of the child.

LEARNINGS

SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

The project activities were strategically developed and implemented to safeguard the rights and well-being of children, as well as mitigate the prevalence of GBV among children. This included the establishment of timely and appropriate child protection and psychosocial support services, as well as strengthening coordinated child protection systems. In addition, community mobilization, and awareness-raising efforts (on child rights, child safety, signs and effects of child abuse, early childhood marriage, protection from explosive arms topics) were also conducted to mitigate risks and promote resilience among affected communities.

It is important to recognize that the effects of these situations can be long-lasting and persistent even after the initial emergency has passed. In times of crisis, children face multiple risks that can have severe consequences on their physical and emotional well-being. These risks may include unintentional harm due to hazardous living conditions or lack of proper care, separation from their families and communities because of displacement, loss of loved ones, and disruption to their daily lives. This can lead to further trauma and vulnerability, sexual abuse, physical violence and abuse from both adults and other children. Such abuse can result in devastating long-term effects on children's emotional and psychosocial well-being, health, and development. Of the children supported by this project, 62 who are sexual-abuse survivors (seven boys, 55 girls), received psychosocial and cash support and were referred to other service providers for further medical, legal, and shelter support.



Street children with Mandy Yamanis, former Head of Safeguarding at GOAL Global, Geta Kassa, Head of Safeguarding at GOAL Ethiopia and Assefa Getaneh, Executive Director of the Centre of Concern (COC), and COC staff at the ChildSPACE facility in Hawassa City, Ethiopia.

Safe spaces play a pivotal role in providing psychosocial support, allowing children to express themselves freely, connect with peers, and receive the emotional reinforcement needed to navigate through trying circumstances. Offering a listening ear, genuine companionship, and a shoulder to lean on, these spaces help ease the anxieties and stresses that often accompany crises. The safe spaces allow children to engage in social interactions, which can aid in reducing feelings of isolation and trauma. Furthermore, through various activities and programs offered in these spaces, children develop new skills, build resilience, and regain a sense of control over their lives. During emergencies, safe spaces for young children become invaluable, playing a crucial role in safeguarding their well-being and offering a semblance of normalcy amidst chaos. Moreover, safe spaces serve as platforms for more than just space, empowering children to engage in meaningful activities that foster their emotional development and aid in processing trauma. By offering opportunities for play, structured learning, and various forms of engagement, these spaces become nurturing environments that build resilience and emotional well-being. Through interactive sessions and educational programs, children not only find avenues for recreation but also learn vital life skills that equip them to cope with the psychological burdens of emergencies.

ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Due to the conflicts, severe drought, and resulting displacement, numerous children had been left without access to education. In some cases, their families were unable to cover the costs of school uniforms, school materials, and hygiene supplies necessary for them to return to school. Recognizing the pressing need for these children's well-being and prospects, GOAL stepped in to provide financial support for 4,548 children (2,519 boys and 2,029 girls). Through providing an average of \$118 per child through their caregiver, GOAL aimed to assist in the purchase of essential scholastic materials and clothing for the children.

The creation and implementation of Child-Friendly Spaces within schools proved to be instrumental in providing a secure and nurturing educational setting for children impacted by emergencies. These spaces not only ensured safety but also played a pivotal role in encouraging affected children to resume their studies, fostering a positive and supportive environment. Students focussed on their education and social development without external distractions or fear.

The spaces also fostered a sense of inclusivity and acceptance among students, helping to reduce instances of bullying and discrimination. This ultimately created a conducive learning environment where students can thrive academically and personally. Furthermore, the learnings of this project also suggest these services should ideally be situated within the school environment to avoid segregating or stigmatizing the children receiving them. The learnings indicate that the psychosocial support provided is fully school based, assisting children in developing coping mechanisms for their stress and trauma, while also supporting their continued attendance and engagement in their regular schooling. This integrated, school-based approach seems to be the preferred approach, as it helps balance the need for specialized support while minimizing potential stigmatization that could arise from pulling children out of their normal classes.

STAKEHOLDER CONSENSUS ON TARGETING CRITERIA

With a diverse group of participants at the Inception Workshop, good facilitation skills were critical for voices of the poor and disadvantaged to be heard. Prior knowledge of the power dynamics by the programme team/ workshop facilitator was essential. To level the discussion platform and ensure that the targeting process was devoid of any influence, the facilitator needed to outline the ground rules that enhance equal participation.

The critical exercise for the workshop participants was to agree on geographical targeting criteria. The geographical ranking exercise was contentious as some participants wanted to ensure their preferred areas were ranked highest. Hence it was important for the participants to first agree on key vulnerability indicators that would be used to differentiate one area from the other. To ensure that no vulnerable area was left behind, the programme team conducted an independent mapping exercise prior to the Inception Workshop.

Compared to geographical targeting, the development of household targeting criteria was less contentious. This was made possible using easily identifiable demographic categorical indicators such as age, gender, health and disability.



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REGISTRATION PROCESS

A robust registration instrument incorporating the household targeting criteria and baseline indicators was developed using CommCare, a mobile data collection platform. The tool enhanced the cost-effectiveness of the exercise as it supported two important steps in programming- identification of programme beneficiaries and collection of programme baseline values for outcome and impact level indicators. This also reduced the number of times that survey teams had to visit households, which was important in avoiding 'survey fatigue' particularly in an urban environment.

The use of an in-built vulnerability scoring mechanism in the CommCare registration instrument coupled with a PowerBi dashboard enabled the programme team to make real-time decisions towards achieving registration objectives. For the survey team, the household vulnerability score was calculated automatically following the completion of the registration, which was useful in the identification of households that proceeded to answer baseline questions.

As the baseline survey targeted a sample of programme beneficiaries, it was important that only households with a high likelihood of participation in the Uplift programme completed the baseline section of the registration instrument. For a household to be eligible for programme assistance, it needed a minimum vulnerability score of 12. Hence, only households that met the minimum vulnerability score were considered to complete the baseline section of the registration instrument. To ensure that a statistically significant sample of households was interviewed, the registration instrument was designed with an algorithm that enabled the enumerator to interview the ninth eligible respondent to achieve the targeted sample size.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The project involved providing opportunities for children with physical disabilities to access recreational spaces, allowing them to fully participate. Despite these efforts, it was observed that the overall participation of children with physical disabilities remained relatively lower compared to other groups. However, information on their rights, seeking appropriate support when needed, and educating them about explosive arms were provided. Children with visual and hearing impairments faced challenges in benefiting from these spaces due to the lack of specialized recreational supplies and aid materials available to cater for their unique needs. In response, GOAL facilitated referral services for these children, connecting them with other agencies capable of providing the necessary support and accommodation. This initiative aimed to ensure that all children, regardless of their disabilities, could experience the joy and enrichment that recreational activities bring, fostering inclusivity and accessibility for every participant. Through collaborative efforts, GOAL will continue engaging like-minded organisations to receive guidance on learning how Child-Friendly Spaces can become more inclusive for the different needs of girls and boys with disabilities.

STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION FOR INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

The project employed a systematic approach in recognizing the importance of establishing sustainable long-term solutions. This involved improving accountability mechanisms for children within both government structures and community-based systems. In collaboration with the relevant local government authorities, the Child-Friendly Spaces are fully functional and operational across multiple elementary schools. GOAL has also consistently managed and referred numerous child abuse cases including child and early marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual and physical abuse, and stigmatization of street-connected children, and works with likeminded organizations to offer protection support and services to children.

Through the implementation of the Child-Friendly Spaces project, GOAL has not only successfully created safe and supportive environments for children but has also gained valuable insights and knowledge from this initiative through working with different local government partners. Effective stakeholder collaboration and coordination is essential for successfully addressing and resolving child protection issues. By engaging all relevant organizations, including government agencies, a cohesive and complementary approach can be fostered to ensure the well-being and safeguarding of vulnerable children. This collaborative effort allows GOAL to not only secure physical spaces but also ensure their proper functionality, while also identifying and providing support to vulnerable and unaccompanied children. By working together towards a common goal, a safe and supportive environment can be created for those in need, resulting in a lasting positive impact on their lives. The knowledge and understanding of 1,089 key stakeholders (571 female and 518 male) were enhanced through the comprehensive child protection training provided.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is important to recognize that the effects of these situations can be long-lasting and persistent even after the initial emergency has passed. In addition to psychosocial support, further referrals to other service providers for medical, legal, and shelter are required for long-term support.
2. It is imperative to establish a secure and safe environment for children as ensuring their safety is of utmost significance. Engaging in social interactions, offering children freedom of expression, and providing access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene resources allows children to build resilience, process their experiences and emotions effectively, and equip children with essential life skills.
3. Addressing the educational needs of children in all humanitarian and developmental projects is key. The creation and implementation of Child-Friendly Spaces within schools is instrumental in providing a secure and nurturing educational setting for children impacted by emergencies. These spaces not only ensure safety but also play a pivotal role in encouraging affected children to resume disrupted studies.
4. Psychosocial support provided is recommended to be fully school based to assist children in developing coping mechanisms for their stress and trauma, while also supporting their continued attendance and engagement in their regular schooling. This helps balance the need for specialized support while minimizing potential stigmatization that could arise from pulling children out of their normal classes.
5. Interventions must strive to produce disability-friendly materials, facilities, and services to cater for their differentiated needs. Collaboration with organizations who support children with disabilities is key.
6. Recognizing the importance of establishing sustainable long-term solutions through improved accountability mechanisms for children within both government structures and community-based systems is imperative to enhance the future for children. Increasing cross-stakeholder collaboration is vital to successfully integrate such approaches.



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Group photo of Mary Van Lieshout, GOAL's former Deputy CEO and Director of External Affairs, with GOAL Ethiopia staff, MCMDO (implementing partner) staff, and ChildSPACE project participants at the MCMDO compound in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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