

LEARNING BRIEF

Action Learning from application of the ENGAGE Programme's **FEMALE CAREGIVERS TOOL**



The '**Female Caregivers' Tool** is part of Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA) holistic programme, called **ENGAGE** – Enhancing Girl's Agency and Gender Equality, that aims for preventing, mitigating, and responding to child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

The '**Female Caregivers' Tool** was piloted in Somalia and Iraq, with a total of 65 participants engaging in the programme. The target group focused on caregivers of adolescent girls who were engaged in the Life Skills programme. Evaluations were conducted with both facilitators and beneficiaries after each of the 22 sessions. Additionally Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were facilitated with the staff and participants at the end of the programme.

Significant findings on how well the tool was working, include:

WHAT WORKED?



Female caregivers expressed overwhelming positive feedback related to their experience participating in the **ENGAGE** programme. Most common reported successes included:

- Sessions encouraged active participation through various methods of facilitation (role plays, interactive activities, etc.). This enhanced opportunities to ask questions and encouraged involvement from all participants.
- All sessions were engaging and interesting (both content and structure of sessions), which allowed for meaningful discussion and important lessons to be learnt. This was particularly relevant for understanding negative impacts of CEFM and how to better build relationships with our daughters.
- Sessions were well adapted to religious and cultural context, meaning participants were best able to understand harmful social norms that drive CEFM in their community, and come up with practical solutions for change.

The most useful and successful sessions as reported by facilitators included:

- **Session 7: Communicating with Adolescent Girls and Boys** about their Aspirations - This is a joint dialogue session between groups of caregivers and their adolescents who are participating in the adolescent sessions. It allowed for female caregivers to best understand the likes and dislikes, interests and dreams of their adolescents. This then informed their targeted action plans at the end of the programme.
- **Session 11: Household Decision Making** – This is an optional joint session for caregivers whose spouse/partner is also attending the **ENGAGE** programme. It allowed for both male and female caregivers to better understand the right women have in decision making in the household, which can lead to better gender equality in the home, plus female caregivers' involvement related to delaying CEFM.



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WHAT CAN BE IMPROVED?



The participating female caregivers shared:

- It was challenging to attend all 22 sessions. Participants in Somalia stressed difficulties with participation, particularly during times when they were facing extreme drought in Somalia and needed to focus all their time to generating income. Participants expressed an opinion that provision of incentives to support participation would be desirable.
- Some caregivers needed a dedicated room for breastfeeding and childcare.

The facilitators shared that:

- Some sessions felt similar to others and need to be revised and merged.
- **Session 12: Planning the Family Budget** – This is an optional joint session. The session was challenging to facilitate as male caregivers often dominated the activities and reported to feel uncomfortable about women having control of family budget. This highlighted the lack of consideration for expenses related to women and girls, particularly related to girls' education. It required allocation of longer time to overcome the challenges.
- **Session 21: Leading the Way to Change** was challenging for female caregivers, as they felt their voices were not respected or heard in their communities, resulting in lack of confidence to make action plans.



⚠ NOTE: As the tool was finalised, participants' and facilitators' observations were considered, and further adjustments were done to various sessions, as well as to the activities used in the curriculum, to better serve the participants' needs.

IMPACT



- Female caregivers applied skills and knowledge learnt in the ENGAGE programme, including better communication with daughters, understanding how to observe emotions and show empathy for challenges they face, and ability to better understand each other.
- Information was shared beyond sessions with friends, neighbours, government colleagues (Iraq) and other family members. Most common shared subjects included negative consequences of CEFM, importance of girls remaining in school and benefit of women's role in decision making and family budget planning.
- Participants have recommended the **ENGAGE** to peers and encouraged attendance, with the hope of others understanding the rights of the girl and changing social norms that drive CEFM in their community.
- **ENGAGE** programme encouraged respect and greater connection amongst the family unit, which will be recognised by the community and positively impact how other family units treat each other (changing harmful gender norms).
- Attempt to reduce domestic chores for adolescent girls to allow for more time for education.
- Commitment to including girls in family decision making, participation and girls having input on issues that directly affect them.

“Previously, my daughters did not have the courage to come and share their problems with me, but after learning how to create a good relationship between my daughters and I, our relationship has improved. Prior to this programme, they were simply kids who were not considered members of the family when making decisions.” – A female participant from Iraq.

- As females are the primary caregivers for children, they have the greatest opportunity to support girls and advocate on their behalf when needed. Educating and empowering female caregivers will in turn increase the protective environment and rights of girls in the home and community.
- Caregivers created practical and achievable action plans focused on awareness raising of harmful impacts of CEFM and working with schools to support girls to remain engaged in education.
- The caregivers who demonstrated harmful beliefs and attitudes at the start of the programme proved that they support gender equality for adolescent girls and are equipped and willing to challenge husbands and community members.



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